

The Fourfold Gospel Narrative

I. The Four Gospels

INSPIRATION has provided four more or less interdependent accounts of the life and teachings of our Lord. Each of these four has its own distinctive characteristics, each emphasizes certain aspects of the life and teachings of Jesus, each makes a unique contribution to the gospel narrative as a whole. Furthermore, each was apparently written with a specific objective in view that determined its arrangement of material, which is sometimes chronological and sometimes topical. See pp. 175-179, 272.

A complete picture of the gospel story can be secured only when the four accounts are properly blended together into one unified, chronological narrative. The arrangement of events by which such a composite narrative becomes possible is called a harmony of the Gospels. Less than half a century after the four Gospels are known to have been circulating together (which was soon after A.D. 125) Tatian combined the four accounts into one called the Diatessaron (c. A.D. 170; see p. 122). Since the appearance of this, the first Gospel harmony, countless attempts have been made to arrange the events of the life of our Lord in chronological order.

Although fundamental harmony pervades the four Gospel accounts, and although the four have much in common, there are at least three chronological problems that call for a solution. These problems are due largely to the fact that each Gospel records incidents not related by the others, and to the further fact that where the same incidents are recorded in more than one Gospel they do not always appear in the same order. These three major problems are: (1) how to determine the length of Jesus' ministry, (2) how to coordinate the Judean ministry, reported only by John, with the Galilean ministry of the Synoptics, as the first three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are commonly known, and (3) how to correlate events in the Peraean ministry, related only by Luke, with certain other events of the same period given by the other Gospel writers. It is not the purpose of this article to discuss the various problems encountered in arranging a Gospel harmony. For a discussion of each of these three major problems see p. 247, Additional Note on Luke 4, and comment on Matt. 19:1 respectively, and for other problems see opening comment on the passages involved. Concerning the synoptic problem, see pp. 175-179, 306, 307.

Because of the existing differences of opinion on how to correlate the Gospel of John with the Synoptics, modern Gospel harmonies generally omit John. The best Greek harmonies are those of Burton and Goodspeed (*A Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels in Greek*) and Albert Huck (*Synopsis of the First Three Gospels*, reprinted 1949). The best English harmonies are those of the International Council of Religious Education (*Gospel Parallels*) and Ralph D. Heim (*A Harmony of the Gospels*, including John).

As noted, each of the four Gospels makes its own distinctive contribution to the Gospel story, and thus to a harmony of the Gospels. Acquaintance with the particular characteristics of the Gospels not only renders them individually more intelligible and meaningful, but contributes to a richer understanding and appreciation of the Gospel narrative as a whole. The following facts relating to each of the Gospels are particularly worthy of note in the construction of a harmony.

Matthew.—The author of the first Gospel was an eyewitness to events that occurred during approximately the last half of Jesus' ministry. In length and completeness his account is second only to that of Luke. Of the 179 incidents in the accompanying

Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew has 95, or 53 per cent, and of these 14 are exclusive with him. Matthew tends to group events in topical order, and as a result his account often deviates from strict chronological order. Matthew is pre-eminently the reporter of Jesus' sermons and other discourses, such as the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5 to 7), instruction given the Twelve (ch. 10), the Sermon by the Sea (ch. 13), the last day of teaching in the Temple (chs. 21; 22), and our Lord's return (chs. 24; 25). Matthew has altogether 21 of the 40 parables narrated by the various Gospel writers, and 20 of the 35 miracles.

Mark.—So far as is known, Mark was not an eyewitness of the events he describes. It is generally believed that he narrates the life of Christ as he heard it from the lips of the apostle Peter (see p. 178). Mark relates 79 of the 179 incidents listed in the accompanying Gospel Harmony (about 44 per cent), or nearly as many as Matthew, in less than two thirds of the space. Mark relates 18 of the 35 miracles, but only 6 of the 40 parables. Obviously it was Mark's purpose to report what Jesus did rather than what He said. The Gospel according to Mark might, for lack of a more exact term, be called a brief biography of our Lord. It follows a much more precise chronological pattern than that of Matthew. The resemblance between Matthew and Mark is particularly striking. Similarly, Mark has much in common with Luke, but Matthew resembles Luke less than it does Mark.

Luke.—As Luke specifically states (see on ch. 1:1–4), he was not an eyewitness of the events he describes. His Gospel is both longer and more complete than any of the others. Of the 179 incidents in the Harmony outline, Luke has 118, or about 66 per cent. Of these, 43 incidents are exclusive with Luke. They are concerned mostly with the infancy and childhood of Jesus (chs. 1; 2), and with the period of His Peraean ministry (chs. 9:51 to 18:34), to which Luke devotes 31 per cent of his space. His order is more nearly chronological than that of Matthew, but not so much so as that of Mark or, more especially, that of John. Luke reports 26 of the 40 parables, and 20 of the 35 miracles (see p. 192). From a historical point of view Luke is more full and complete than either of the first two Gospels, and, for that matter, than John. Luke stands first in length, in completeness, in uniqueness, and in the number of miracles and parables reported.

John.—In scope and content the Gospel of John is almost altogether different from the Synoptic Gospels. Although the writer of the fourth Gospel was an eyewitness of the life and ministry of Jesus from beginning to end, he mentions only 48 of the 179 incidents listed in the Harmony outline (27 per cent), far less than any of the others (see chs. 20:30, 31; 21:25). Nevertheless, of these 48 incidents 31 are exclusive with him. Without the record given by John we would have little or no information concerning the first year of Jesus' ministry, devoted largely to Judea. More important yet, John, alone among the gospel writers, follows a strictly chronological sequence from beginning to end and provides a framework by which it is possible to determine the approximate length of Jesus' ministry (see sec. II below).

With the entire scope of Jesus' life and ministry vividly in mind, John selected, primarily, those incidents that mark turning points and crises. But in each instance he shows greater interest in the significance of the event—as reflected each time by an accompanying discourse—than in the event itself. Like Matthew, though without duplication, John reports various discourses at considerable length; however, those reported by Matthew deal primarily with the kingdom of heaven and the character of its

subjects, whereas those of John are concerned almost exclusively with Jesus' nature as the incarnate Son of God and with the purpose of His earthly mission. John is not so much a sermon reporter like Matthew, or a biographer like Mark, or a historian like Luke. He is pre-eminently a theologian, whose inspired insight led him to set Jesus Christ forth as the incarnate Son of God.

For further information concerning the Gospels see the Introduction to each. For a discussion of certain theories concerning the relationship of the Gospels to each other see pp. 175-179.

Data significant to the construction of a harmony of the Gospels may be compared thus:

	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>	<i>John</i>
1. Length in pages (Oxford edition T 5 51 064)	38.52	24.54	41.01	30.03*
2. Completeness of coverage (based on the 179 incidents in the accompanying Harmony):				
Number of incidents	952	793	1181	484
Per cent of total	53	44	66	27
3. Sections reported exclusively (of the 179 in the accompanying Harmony):				
Number of sections	143	14	431	312
Per cent of total	8	1	24	17
4. Chronological precision (per cent of incidents appearing in chronological order)†				
Number of incidents	884	962	943	1001
Per cent of total	212	63	261	04

parables
reported (out
of 40)

6. Number of miracles reported (out of 35)	201	183	201	84
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II. Chronology of the Gospel of John

The chronological precision of the Gospel of John provides the basic framework for the construction of a harmony. Among the Synoptics—the first three Gospels—Mark presents the most nearly chronological order of events, and for incidents not reported by John the order in Mark is therefore usually followed. Where Matthew differs from Mark, preference may be given to the order confirmed by Luke. Where the chronology of the Gospels themselves is not altogether clear, sequence as stated or implied in *The Desire of Ages* is followed. Numerous minor incidents whose chronological setting is not certain have been tentatively assigned a position on the basis of circumstantial evidence. It is important to remember that while the fundamental pattern of events as represented by this Harmony is fairly well established, the assignment of a place to many of these minor incidents is only tentative. For Christian Era dating followed in the Harmony, see pp. 240-254.

In view of the importance of the Gospel of John in the construction of a harmony of the Gospels, the following data provided by the fourth Gospel are particularly to be noted:

John identifies three Passovers (chs. 2:13; 6:4; 13:1) and an unnamed “feast of the Jews” (ch. 5:1). Although the latter has been identified with various Jewish feasts, it seems preferable to consider it a Passover, the second of Jesus’ ministry (see p. 247; *The Duration of Christ’s Ministry*). Thus, John records incidents at four successive Passover festivals. Jesus was baptized several months prior to the first of these Passovers, and the length of His ministry was therefore approximately three and a half years. According to the tentative chronology adopted by this commentary, the four Passovers of the ministry of our Lord were those of A.D. 28, 29, 30, 31.

The Passover of A.D. 28 seems to have been the occasion of Jesus’ first visit to Jerusalem after His baptism (see John 2:11–13; cf. DA 154, 161), for it was at this feast that He announced His mission as the Messiah and entered upon His work (DA 161). The incidents of John 5 are said to have taken place at His “second visit to Jerusalem” (MB 2). Furthermore, events of ch. 6, which John identifies with the Passover season (v. 4), occurred one year after those of ch. 5 (see DA 393, 213; cf. 231, 232). From the Passover of A.D. 29 to the Feast of Tabernacles in the autumn of A.D. 30 Jesus attended none of the national festivals (John 6:4; cf. ch. 7:1, 2; DA 450, 451), and was therefore absent from the Passover of A.D. 30 (see DA 395). Some three years elapsed between the baptism and the Feast of Tabernacles of A.D. 30 (DA 467), and 3 1/2 years between the baptism and the final Passover (DA 233; cf. 506, 541, 664). Also, three years elapsed between the first and last Passover, those of A.D. 28 and 31 (DA 591, 593; cf. 161).

In order to correlate the Judean ministry reported by John with the Galilean ministry reported by the synoptic writers, it is necessary to ascertain the time when the Galilean ministry began. Some assign this to the autumn of A.D. 28 and others to the spring of A.D.

29, after the Passover. On the basis of evidence presented in the Additional Note on Luke 4 this commentary tentatively assigns the formal opening of the Galilean ministry of our Lord to the late spring of A.D. 29.

The period between the Passovers of A.D. 28 and 29 was devoted largely to Judea, that between the Passovers of A.D. 29 and 30 almost exclusively to Galilee, and that between the Passovers of A.D. 30 and 31 to regions bordering on Galilee, to Samaria, and to Peraea. For further information on this problem see, *The Duration of Christ's Ministry*, *the Opening of the Galilean Ministry*, and *The Ministry of Our Lord*.

III. The Gospel Harmony and Its Use

Most commentaries on the Gospels comment more or less at length on each Gospel; others follow a harmonistic arrangement, commenting once on each incident. This commentary gives major comment on each incident in connection with the Gospel that reports it most fully. Comment on parallel accounts in the other Gospels is limited to additional narrative details and linguistic and textual problems that occur there. Where the various accounts of the same incident are approximately equivalent, comment is generally given on that of Matthew. Where two Gospel reports of the same incident are marked by extensive differences, major comment appears on both.

For instance, the story of the paralytic lowered through the roof appears in all three of the Synoptics, but major comment on the incident is given only for the account in Mark, limited comment in Luke, and none in Matthew. Comment in Luke is restricted to details of the incident not given by Mark. Turning to comment on the incident as reported in Mark 2:1, the reader will find the following entry: **1. Again he entered.** [*The Paralytic Lowered Through the Roof*, Mark 2:1–12=Matt. 9:2–8=Luke 5:17–26. Major comment: Mark. See *Early Galilean Ministry*; *The Ministry of Our Lord*; on miracles pp. 208–213.]

The equals sign (=) indicates parallel accounts of this incident in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The expression, “Major comment: Mark,” indicates that the incident is there commented on at length. The map referred to indicates where the incident occurred, and the chart, its chronological relationship to other incidents. Reference to the section on miracles will provide helpful comment on miracles in general and an analysis of this particular miracle in comparison with others. Further helpful information may be had by turning to this incident (No. 40) in the *Harmony of the Gospels* (p. 197).

For major comment on any incident in the life of our Lord and for related information provided in this volume of the commentary, see the *Harmony of the Gospels* on pp. 196–201. For a statement of the principles followed in the construction of this Harmony see pp. 190–193. For a discussion of the basic chronological problems involved see pp. 240–264. For a chronological study of each incident see major comment on the incident. For maps and charts paralleling the Harmony see *The Nativity, Childhood and Youth of Jesus*, *Early Ministry and Baptism to First Passover*, *Judean Ministry from First Passover A.D. 28*, *Early Galilean Ministry*, *Middle Galilean Ministry*, *Closing Galilean Ministry*, *Retirement from Public Ministry*, *Early Peraean Ministry*, *Closing Peraean Ministry*, *Betrayal, Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus*, *Closing Ministry at Jerusalem*, *The Resurrection and Subsequent Events* and a *Synopsis of the Life of Christ*, a *Suggestive Chronology of Christ's Birth*, *The Chronology of Luke 3:1, 2*, *The Reigns of the Herods*, *The Duration of Christ's Ministry*, *the Opening of the Galilean Ministry*, *The Ministry of Our Lord*, *the Crucifixion In Relation To The Passover*, *the Passion Week*, *the Resurrection to Ascension*, *Palestine Under the Herodians*, respectively. For comparative tables of the

parables and miracles of our Lord see pp. 205-207 and 210-213, respectively. For an index to the Harmony see pp. 202, 203.

How to Use the Harmony of the Gospels.—The following illustration will assist the reader in making use of the Gospel Harmony. On p. 197 appears the entry:

No.	Incident	Map	Chart	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
52	A Blind and Dumb Demoniac; (M-14) The Unpardonable Sin (P-15)	6	7	12:22-45	3:20-30	11:14-32	

1. A glance at the heading **IV. Ministry in Galilee (Second Passover, A.D. 29—Third Passover, A.D. 30)**, preceding No. 32 (top of p. 197), indicates the period of our Lord's ministry during which incident No. 52 occurred. The more immediate setting of the incident may be ascertained by a glance at the Harmony sections preceding and following No. 52.

2. The title, "A Blind and Dumb Demoniac," is standard for this incident throughout the commentary. That the additional title, "The Unpardonable Sin," does not appear as a separate entry indicates that the discourse of our Lord on this subject was closely connected with the healing of the blind and dumb demoniac. The two should be studied together.

3. The designation "M-14" following the incident indicates that this incident appears as No. 14 in the table of miracles, pp. 210-213. This table facilitates a comparison with similar miracles and with other miracles performed at about the same time or under similar circumstances. The table also provides information concerning the purposeful relationship of the miracle to the ministry of our Lord as a whole (see p. 211).

4. The designation "P-15" following the incident indicates that in the table of parables, pp. 205-207, one there entitled "Seven Unclean Spirits" (included in the references listed for No. 52 of the Harmony) appears as No. 15. This table facilitates comparison with similar parables and indicates the special points of truth illustrated by each parable. Where the title of the parable is not listed separately in the Harmony, as here, the table of parables indicates where major comment may be found. Bracketed parable numbers (see Nos. 77, 102) indicate that the parables so designated, while similar to those included in the Harmony references, were not given at the same time and are therefore not identical.

5. Boldface type for the Scripture reference to Matthew indicates that major comment on the incident of No. 52 of the Harmony appears there. The same incident is also recorded in Mark and Luke, as the references given indicate, but comment there covers only details not mentioned by, or commented on in connection with, Matthew. As may be inferred from the entry, John does not record the incident at all. Bracketed references (see Nos. 107, 156 of the Harmony) indicate that the passages so designated, while similar, are not strictly parallel to those designated by the other references.

6. The number "6" in the column headed "Map" indicates that incident No. 52 of the Harmony appears on the map of the Middle Galilean Ministry). The Middle Galilean Ministry clarifies the geographical setting of the incident, in so far as this is known, and shows its relationship to preceding and following incidents. Bracketed map numbers, as

in No. 55 of the Harmony, indicate that the geographical and chronological setting of the incident of that section may be ascertained from the Middle Galilean Ministry, but that it is not specifically listed on the map.

7. The number “7” in the column headed “Chart” indicates that incident No. 52 of the Harmony appears in The Ministry of Our Lord of the series of charts on the life and ministry of our Lord (see pp. 227-234). Bracketed chart numbers, as in No. 177 of the Harmony, indicate that the chronological setting of incident No. 177 is not specifically listed there, but may be ascertained by a comparison of the chart, Resurrection to Ascension, with comment on Matt. 28:16.

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS

[See explanation, pp. 194, 195.]

I. Infancy to Manhood (Autumn, 5 B.C.—Autumn, A.D. 27)

No.	Incident	Map*	Chart*	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
1	Prologue to John's Gospel	-	-	--	--	--	1:1-18
2	Prologue to Luke's Gospel	-	-	--	--	1:1-4	
3	The Human Ancestry of Jesus	-	-	1:1-17	--	3:23^b-38	
4	The Announcement to Zacharias	1	1	--	--	1:5-25	
5	The Annunciation	1	1	--	--	1:26-38	
6	Mary's Visit to Elisabeth	1	-	--	--	1:39-56	
7	Birth of John the Baptist	1	1	--	--	1:57-80	
8	The Announcement to Joseph; His Marriage	1	[1]	1:18-25			
9	Birth of Jesus	1	2,11	--	--	2:1-7	
10	The Announcement to the Shepherds	1	-	--	--	2:8-20	
11	The	-	-	--	--	2:21	

12	Circumcision Presentation at the Temple	2	-	--	--	2:22-38
13	Visit of the Magi	2	-	2:1-12		
14	Flight to Egypt	2	1	2:13-18		
15	Return to Nazareth	2	[11]	2:19-23	--	2:39-40
16	First Passover Visit	2	1,[11]	--	--	2:41-50
17	Youth and Young Manhood	2	1,[11]	--	--	2:51-52

II. Early Ministry (Autumn, A.D. 27—Spring, A.D. 28)

No.	Incident	Map*	Chart*	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
18	Ministry of John the Baptist	-	3	3:1-12	1:1-8	3:1-18	
19	The Baptism	3	3,4	3:13-17	1:9-11	3:21-23_a	
20	The Temptation	3	7	4:1-11	1:12, 13	4:1-13	
21	Jesus Declared “the Lamb of God”	3	-	--	--	--	1:19-34
22	The First Disciples	3	7	--	--	--	1:35-51
23	The Wedding Feast at Cana (M- 1)*	3	7	--	--	--	2:1-12

III. Ministry in Judea (First Passover, A.D. 28—Second Passover, A.D. 29)

No.	Incident	Map*	Chart*	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
24	<i>First Passover:</i> First Cleansing of the Temple	4	5-7	--	--	--	2:13-25
25	Discussion	4	7	--	--	--	3:1-21

26	With Nicodemus Ministry in Judea	4	6,7	--	--	--	3:22-36
27	The Samaritan Woman	4	6,7	--	--	--	4:1-42
28	The Nobleman's Son† (M-2)	4	7	--	--	--	4:43-54
29	John Imprisoned	4	7	14:3-5	--	3:19, 20	
30	<i>Second Passover:</i> The Invalid at Bethesda (M-3)	4	5-7	--	--	--	5:1-15
31	Rejection by the Sanhedrin: Close of the Judean Ministry	4	5-7	--	--	--	5:16-47

IV. Ministry in Galilee (Second Passover, A.D. 29—Third Passover, A.D. 30)

No.	Incident	Map*	Chart*	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
32	Opening of the Galilean Ministry	5	5-7	4:12	1:14, 15	4:14, 15	
33	First Rejection at Nazareth	5	6,7	--	--	4:16-30	
34	Removal to Capernaum	5	7	4:13-17	--	4:31 ^a	
35	The Call by the Sea (M-4)*	5	7	4:18-22	1:16-20	5:1-11	
36	The Demoniac in the Synagogue (M-5)	5	7	--	1:21-28	4:31 ^b -37	

37	Peter's Mother-in- law; The Sick Healed at Even (M-6)	5	7	8:14-17	1:29- 34	4:38-41
38	<i>First Galilean Tour:</i>	5	7	4:23-25	1:35- 39	4:42-44
39	The First Leper (M-7)	5	7	8:2-4	1:40- 45	5:12-16
40	The Paralytic Lowered Through the Roof (M-8)	5	7	9:2-8	2:1-12	5:17-26
41	Call of Levi Matthew	5	7	9:9	2:13, 14	5:27, 28
42	Plucking Grain on the Sabbath	5	-	12:1-8	2:23- 28	6:1-5
43	The Man With a Withered Hand (M-9)	5	-	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11
44	Jesus' Popularity	[5]	-	12:15- 21	3:7-12	
45	Appointment of the Twelve	5	7	--	3:13- 19	6:12-16
46	Sermon on the Mount (P-17)*	5	7	5:1-8:1	--	6:17-49
47	The Centurion's Servant (M- 10)	6	7	8:5-13	--	7:1-10
48	Two Blind Men (M-11)	6	-	9:27-31		
49	A Dumb Demoniac (M-12)	6	-	9:32-34		
50	<i>Second</i>	6	7	9:35	--	8:1-3

	<i>Galilean Tour:</i>					
51	The Widow's Son at Nain† (M-13)	6	7	--	--	7:11-17
52	A Blind and Dumb Demoniac; (M-14)	6	7	12:22-45	3:20-30	11:14-32
	The Unpardonable Sin (P-15)					
53	Visit of Jesus' Mother and Brothers	6	7	12:46-50	3:31-35	8:19-21
54	Sermon by the Sea:	6	7	13:1-53	4:1-34	8:4-18
	The Pearl of Great Price (P-1)					[13:18-21]*
	The Mustard Seed (P-6)					
	The Tares (P-7)					
	The Sower, the Seed, and the Soils (P-9)					
	Hidden Treasure (P-11)					
	The Growing Seed (P-19)					
	The Leaven (P-20)					
	Treasures Old and New (P-32)					
	The Dragnet (P-40)					
55	The Privations of	[6]	-	8:19-22		

56	Discipleship The Storm on the Lake (M-15)*	6	7	8:18, 23-27	4:35-41	8:22-25	
57	The Demoniacs of Gadara (M-16)	6	7	8:28-9:1	5:1-20	8:26-39	
58	Matthew's Feast†	6	7	9:10-13	2:15-17	5:29-32	
59	the Question About Fasting (P-12)*	6	-	9:14-17	2:18-22	5:33-39	
60	The Invalid Woman; (M-17) Jairus' Daughter (M-18)	6	7	9:18-26	5:21-43	8:40-56	
61	The Inquiry by John's Disciples	6	-	11:2-6	- -	7:18-23	
62	Jesus' Eulogy of John	[6]	-	11:7-30	- -	7:24-35	
63	<i>Third Galilean Tour:</i> Mission of the Twelve	7	7	9:36-11:1	6:7-13	9:1-6	
64	Second Rejection at Nazareth	7	7	13:54-58	6:1-6		
65	Martyrdom of John the Baptist	[7]	7	14:1, 2, 6-12	6:14-29	9:7-9	
66	<i>[Third Passover:]</i> Feeding the Five Thousand (M-19)	7	7	14:13-21	6:30-44	9:10-17	6:1-14
67	Jesus Walks	7	7	14:22-	6:45-	- -	6:15-24

	on the Lake (M-20)			36	56		
68	Sermon on the Bread of Life; Rejection in Galilee	7	7	--	--	--	6:25-7:1
69	Contention About Tradition and Ceremonial Defilement	7	-	15:1-20	7:1-23		

V. Retirement From Public Ministry (Third Passover, A.D. 30—Autumn, A.D. 30)

No.	Incident	Map*	Chart*	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
70	Withdrawal to Phoenicia (M-21)	8	5,7	15:21-28	7:24-30		
71	A Deaf-mute Healed; Other Miracles in Decapolis (M-22)	8	7	15:29-31	7:31-37		
72	Feeding the Four Thousand (M-23)	8	7	15:32-39	8:1-10		
73	The Demand for a Sign	8	7	16:1-12	8:11-21		
74	The Blind man Near Bethsaida (M-24)	8	7		8:22-26		
75	Withdrawal to Caesarea Philippi: The Great Confession	8	7	16:13-28	8:27-9:1	9:18-27	
76	A Secret Journey Through	8	-	17:22, 23	9:30-32	9:43 ^b -45	

77	Galilee Humility, Reconcilia- tion, and Forgive- ness (P-31, [2])*	8	-	18:1-35	9:33-50	9:46-50	
78	The Transfiguration	8	7	17:1-13	9:2-13	9:28-36	
79	The Demon- possessed Boy (M-25)	8	7	17:14-21	9:14-29	9:37-43 _a	
80	The Temple Half Shekel (M-26)	8	7	17:24-27			

VI. Ministry in Samaria and Perea (Autumn, A.D. 30—Passover, A.D. 31)

No.	Incident	Map*	Chart*	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
81	Secret Journey to the Feast of Tabernacles	9	5,7	--	--	--	7:2-13
82	Teaching in the Temple	9	-	--	--	--	7:14-52
83	The Adulteress	9	7	--	--	--	7:53-8:11
84	The Light of the World	[9]	-	--	--	--	8:12-30
85	The Argument About Descent From Abraham	[9]	-	--	--	--	8:31-59
86	The Man Born Blind (M-27)*	9	7	--	--	--	9:1-41
87	The Good Shepherd	[9]	-	--	--	--	10:1-21
88	Final Departure From Galilee; Opening of	9	5,7	19:1, 2	10:1	9:51-56	

	the Samaritan–Peraean Ministry						
89	Tests of Discipleship	[9]	-	--	--	9:57-62	
90	Mission of the Seventy	9	7	--	--	10:1-24	
91	The Good samaritan (P–30)*	[9]	-	--	--	10:25-37	
92	In the Home of Mary and Martha	10	-	--	--	10:38-42	
93	At the Feast of Dedication†	10	7	--	--	--	10:22-42
94	Return to Peraea: Instruction on Prayer (P–22)	[10]	-	--	--	11:1-13	
95	The Inner Light	[10]	-	--	--	11:33-36	
96	Dining with a Pharisee	[10]	-	--	--	11:37-54	
97	A Warning Against the Pharisees	[10]	-	--	--	12:1-12	
98	The folly of Riches (P–18)	[10]	-	--	--	12:13-34	
99	Awaiting the Master’s Return (P–33, 36)	[10]	-	--	--	12:35-59	
100	Divine Justice and Mercy (P–5)	[10]	-	--	--	13:1-9	
101	The Crippled Woman (M–28)	[10]	-	--	--	13:10-17	
102	Growth of	[10]	-	--	--	13:18-30	

	the King- dom of Heaven (P-[6, 20])*						
103	A Warning of Divine Judgment	[10]	-	--	--	13:31-35	
104	Dining With a Chief Pharisee (M-29, P- 24)	[10]	-	--	--	14:1-15	
105	The Great Banquet (P-10)	[10]	-	--	--	14:16-24	
106	The Cost of Disciple- ship (P-14)	[10]	-	--	--	14:25-35	
107	The Lost Sheep (P-2)	[10]	-	[18:12- 14]*	--	15:1-7	
108	The Lost Coin (P-3)	[10]	-	--	--	15:8-10	
109	The Prodigal Son (P-4)	[10]	-	--	--	15:11-32	
110	The Dishonest Steward (P- 28)	[10]	-	--	--	16:1-18	
111	The Rich Man and Lazarus (P- 29)	[10]	-	--	--	16:19-31	
112	Forgiveness, Faith, and Service (P-38)	[10]	-	--	--	17:1-10	
113	The Raising of Lazarus (M-30)	10	7	--	--	--	11:1-45
114	Withdrawal to Ephraim	10	-	--	--	--	11:46-57

115	The Ten Lepers (M-31)	10	7	--	--	17:11-19	
116	When and How the Kingdom Comes	[10]	-	--	--	17:20-37	
117	The Unjust Judge (P-23)*	[10]	-	--	--	18:1-8	
118	The Pharisee and the Publican (P-25)	[10]	-	--	--	18:9-14	
119	Marriage and Divorce	[10]	-	19:3-12	10:2-12		
120	Blessing the Children	[10]	-	19:13-15	10:13-16	18:15-17	
121	The Rich Young Ruler	[10]	-	19:16-30	10:17-31	18:18-30	
122	Laborers in the Vineyard (P-37)	[10]	-	20:1-16			
123	Jesus Foretells His Death	[10]	-	20:17-19	10:32-34	18:31-34	
124	The Ambition of James and John	[10]	-	20:20-28	10:35-45		
125	Blind Bartimaeus (M-32)*	10	7	20:29-34	10:46-52	18:35-43	
126	Zaccheus	10	7	--	--	19:1-10	
127	The Nobleman and the Pounds (P-26)	[10]	-	--	--	19:11-28	
128	Simon's	11	7,9	26:6-13	14:3-9	7:36-50	12:1-9

129	Feast† (P-13) The Betrayal Plot	[11]	9	26:1-5 14-16	14:1, 2, 10, 11	22:1-6	12:10, 11
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VII. Passion Week (Fourth Passover, A.D. 31)

No.	Incident	Map*	Chart*	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
130	<i>Fourth Passover: ††</i> The Triumphal Entry	11	9	21:1-11	11:1-11	19:29-44	12:12-19
131	The Fruitless Fig Tree (M-33)	11	9	21:18-22	11:12-14, 20-26		
132	Second Cleansing of the Temple	11	9	21:12-17	11:15-19	19:45-48	
133	The Leaders Challenge Jesus' Authority	11	9	21:23-27	11:27-33	20:1-8	
134	The Two Sons (P-16)	[11]	-	21:28-32			
135	The Wicked Husband-men (P-8)	[11]	-	21:33-46	12:1-12	20:9-19	
136	The Man Without a Wedding Garment (P-21)	[11]	-	22:1-14			
137	Paying Tribute to Caesar	[11]	-	22:15-22	12:13-17	20:20-26	
138	Marriage and the Resurrection	[11]	-	22:23-33	12:18-27	20:27-38	
139	The Great Commandment	[11]	-	22:34-40	12:28-34	20:39, 40	
140	Jesus Silences His Critics	[11]	-	22:41-46	12:35-37	20:41-44	

141	Woes Upon Scribe and Pharisee	[11]	-	23:1-39	12:38-40	20:45-47	
142	The Widow's Mites	[11]	-	--	12:41-44	21:1-4	
143	Interview With Certain Greeks	[11]	-	--	--	--	12:20-36_a
144	Final Rejection by the Jewish Leaders	11	-	--	--	--	12:36^b-50
145	Retirement to the Mount of Olives; Signs of Christ's Return (P-35)	11	9	24:1-51	13:1-37	21:5-38	
146	The Ten Virgins (P-34)	[11]	-	25:1-13			
147	The Talents (P-27)	[11]	-	25:14-30			
148	The Sheep and the Goats (P-39)	[11]	-	25:31-46			
149	Preparation for the Passover	[12]	-	26:17-19	14:12-16	22:7-13	
150	Celebration of the Passover	[12]	8,9	26:20	14:17, 18 _a	22:14-16	
151	Washing the Disciples' Feet	[12]	-	--	--	22:24-30	13:1-20
152	The Lord's Supper	12	8,9	26:26-29	14:22-25	22:17-20	
153	The Betrayer Revealed	[12]	-	26:21-25	14:18 ^b -21	22:21-23	13:21-30
154	Parting Counsel	[12]	-	--	--	--	13:31-14:31
155	Retirement to Gethsemane	12	8,9	26:30	14:26	22:39	
156	A Warning to Peter	12	-	26:31-35	14:27-31	22:31-38	[13:36-38]

	and the Ten						
157	The True Vine	[12]	-	--	--	--	15:1-17
158	A Warning of Persecution	[12]	-	--	--	--	15:18-16:4
159	The Coming of the Comforter	[12]	-	--	--	--	16:5-33
160	Jesus' Intercessory Prayer	[12]	-	--	--	--	17:1-26
161	Gethsemane (M-34)*	12	9	26:36-56	14:32-52	22:40-53	18:1-12
162	Hearing Before Annas	12	9	--	--	--	18:13-24
163	Night Trial Before the Sanhedrin	12	9	26:57-75	14:53-72	22:54-65	18:25-27
164	Day Trial Before the Sanhedrin	12	9	27:1	15:1	22:66-71	
165	Judas' Confession and Suicide	[12]	9	27:3-10			
166	First Trial Before Pilate	12	9,11	27:2, 11-14	15:2-5	23:1-5	18:28-38
167	Hearing before Herod Antipas	12	9,11	--	--	23:6-12	
168	Second Trial Before Pilate	12	9,11	27:15-31_a	15:6-19	23:13-25	18:39-19:16
169	The Crucifixion	12	8,9	27:31^b-56	15:20-41	23:26-49	19:17-37
170	The Burial	12	8,9	27:57-61	15:42-47	23:50-56	19:38-42
171	The Guard at the Tomb	12	9	27:62-66			

VIII. Resurrection to Ascension (Spring, A.D. 31)

No.	Incident	Map*	Chart*	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
172	The Resurrection	13	8-10	28:1-15	16:1-11	24:1-12	20:1-18
173	The Walk to	13	9	--	16:12	24:13-32	

174	Emmaus First Appearance in the Upper Room	13	9	--	16:13	24:33-49	20:19-23
175	Second Appearance in the Upper Room	13	10	--	16:14	--	20:24-29
176	Appearance by the Lake of Galilee (M-35)	[13]	[10]	--	--	--	21:1-23
177	Appearance on a Mountain in Galilee	[13]	[10]	28:16- 20	16:15- 18	--	
178	The Ascension	13	10	--	16:19, 20	24:50-53	
179	Epilogue to John's Gospel	-	-	--	--	--	20:30, 31; 21:24, 25

How to Use Index to the Harmony of the Gospels.—An index to the Harmony of the Gospels appears on pp. 202, 203. Because the same incidents are not always narrated by the various gospel writers in precisely the same order, a harmony of the Gospels cannot list all passages in order, chapter by chapter. The index facilitates the location of harmonistic data on any Gospel passage without a laborious search of the Harmony. For instance, the reader may desire to find the section of the Harmony on Simon's Feast as recorded in Luke 7:36–50. In view of the fact that this incident occurred at the close of Christ's ministry it does not appear in the Harmony along with other references to Luke 7 (see Nos. 47, 51, 61, 62). A glance at the Index indicates that Luke 7:36–50 appears as No. 128 of the Harmony.

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IV. Parables and Their Interpretation

The English word “parable” is from the Gr. *parabolē*, “a juxtaposition,” “a comparison,” “an illustration,” “parable,” “a proverb,” from a verb meaning “to put one thing by the side of another [for comparison],” “to throw beside.” The Gr. *parabolē* and its Hebrew equivalent (see Vol. III, p. 945) are broader in meaning than our word “parable.” However, parables listed as such in this commentary are those that properly fall within the stricter limits of the English word. According to the English definition a parable is a narrative whose primary purpose is to teach truth. In literary form it is an extended metaphor. Many of Christ’s parables were brief to the point of being metaphors or proverbs.

In the Gospels a parable is a narrative “placed alongside” a certain spiritual truth for purposes of “comparison.” The parables of our Lord were usually based on common experiences of everyday life familiar to His hearers, and often on specific incidents that had recently occurred (see DA 499) or that they could see at the time (COL 34; cf. MB 36, 37). The narrative itself was simple and brief, and its conclusion usually so obvious as to involve no uncertainty (see Matt. 21:40, 41). Placed alongside the spiritual truth it was designed to illustrate, the parable thus became a bridge by which the hearers might be led to understand and appreciate that truth. It met the people where they were and, by a pleasant and familiar path, led their thoughts to where Jesus sought to direct them. It was a window through which the soul might gaze upon vistas of heavenly truth.

By parables Jesus: (1) aroused interest, attention, and inquiry; (2) imparted unwanted truth without arousing prejudice; (3) evaded the spies who pursued Him relentlessly; (4) created in the minds of His hearers lasting impressions that would be renewed and intensified when the scenes presented in the parables again came to mind or to view; (5) restored nature as an avenue for knowing God. Parables revealed truth to those willing to receive it, and at times concealed it from others.

In studying the parables of Jesus it is most important to follow sound principles of interpretation. These principles may be briefly summarized thus:

1. A parable is a mirror by which truth can be seen; it is not truth itself.
2. The context in which a parable is given—the place, circumstances, persons to whom it was spoken, and the problem under discussion—must be taken into consideration and made the key to interpretation.
3. Christ’s own introduction and conclusion to the parable generally make its fundamental purpose clear.
4. Every parable illustrates one fundamental aspect of spiritual truth (see list of principles illustrated by the various parables of our Lord, pp. 205-207). Details of a parable are significant only as they contribute to the clarification of that particular point of truth.
5. Before the meaning of the parable in the spiritual realm can be understood it is necessary to have a clear picture of the situation described in the parable, in terms of Oriental customs and modes of thought and expression. Parables are vivid word pictures that must be *seen*, so to speak, before they can be *understood*.
6. In view of the fundamental fact that a parable is given to illustrate truth, and usually one particular truth, no doctrine may be based upon the incidental details of a parable.

7. The parable, in whole and in part, must be interpreted in terms of the truth it is designed to teach, as set forth in literal language in the immediate context and elsewhere in Scripture.

The following list of parables has been selected on the basis of the definition stated on p. 203. These parables are grouped topically, according to the principal truth Christ designed each to illustrate. The scripture listed for each parable gives the place in this commentary where major comment on the parable appears. Cross references following each group of parables indicate other parables in this list with secondary lessons appropriate to the group in which the cross references appear. Cross references accompanying each parable indicate other parables or groups of parables in this list that teach the same or related truths. The section indicated in the Harmony of the Gospels (see pp. 196-201) leads to other sources of information related to each parable. The column headed "Principles Illustrated" provides a brief analysis of the principal teaching or teachings of each parable (see below). For the chronological order of the parables see pp. 196-201.

THE PARABLES OF OUR LORD			
[For an explanation see p. 204.]			
Parable	Major Comment	Harmony Entry*	Principles Illustrated
A. Divine Love, Mercy, and Justice			
1. The Pearl of Great Price	Matt. 13:45, 46	54	The priceless value of redeeming love. The Saviour in search of men; men seeking for salvation. Cf. No. 11.
2. The Lost Sheep	Luke 15:3-7	107	God's love for those who know they are lost but know not how to return to Him. His unwillingness that any should perish. Cf. Nos. 3, 4.
3. The Lost Coin	Luke 15:8-10	108	God's love for those who know not that they are lost. Diligence in seeking the lost. Cf. Nos. 2, 4.
4. The Prodigal Son	Luke 15:11-32	109	God's love for those who have wandered from His love. The hardheartedness of man in contrast with the love of God. Cf. Nos. 2, 3.
5. The Barren Fig Tree	Luke 13:6-9	100	The relationship between divine mercy and justice. God's dealings with the Jewish nation. Cf. Nos. 8, 15, 16, 21 .
B. The Plan of Salvation			
6. The Mustard Seed	Matt. 13:31, 32	54	The extensive, quantitative growth of the kingdom of divine grace, the church. God begins in a small way to accomplish great results. Cf. Nos. 9, 19, 20.
7. The Tares	Matt. 13:24-30	54	Character decides destiny. The purpose of probationary time; tares do not eventually

¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Mt 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

8. The Wicked Husbandmen	Matt. 21:33-43	135	become wheat. Cf. Nos. 9, 29, 40. God's eternal purpose will triumph in spite of man's unfaithfulness. Israel would forfeit its role as the chosen nation. Cf. Nos. 5, 15, 16, 21 .
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C. The Reception of Truth

9. The Sower, the Seed, and the Soils	Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23	54	The reception of truth by different classes of hearers. Cf. Nos. 6-8, 19.
10. The Great Banquet	Luke 14:16-24	105	The danger of neglecting or rejecting truth. God cannot accept a divided heart. Cf. Nos. 6-8, 21.
11. Hidden Treasure	Matt. 13:44	54	The transcendent value of truth and the effort necessary to secure it. Cf. No. 1.
12. New Cloth and New Wine	Mark 2:21, 22	59	Truth versus traditionalism. The danger of preconceived opinions.
13. The Two Debtors	Luke 7:41-43	128	Appreciation of, and gratitude for, the love and mercy of God.
14. Building a Tower; A King Going to War	Luke 14:28-33	106	Counting the cost of discipleship.
15. Seven Unclean Spirits	Matt. 12:43-45	52	The necessity of a positive attitude toward truth; the unpardonable sin. The condition of the Jewish leaders. Justification incomplete without sanctification Cf. Nos. 5, 8, 16, 17, 21.
16. The Two Sons	Matt. 21:28-32	134	Deeds count, not words; profession without practice is hypocrisy. Cf. Nos. 5, 8, 15, 17, 21.
17. Building on the Rock or on Sand	Matt. 7:24-27	46	The perception of truth not an end in itself but a means to the end of a transformed life. The folly of knowledge without obedience. Cf. Nos. 15, 16, 21, 26.
18. The Rich Fool	Luke 12:16-21	98	The danger of worldly-mindedness; the folly of living for material things. To live for self is to perish.

D. The Transformation of Character

19. The Growing Seed	Mark 4:26-29	54	Faith and works: human effort cooperating with infinite power in Christian growth. Cf. Nos. 6, 7, 9, 20.
20. The Leaven	Matt. 13:33	54	The intensive, qualitative growth of the kingdom of heaven. Power from above is implanted in the heart and transforms the life. Cf. Nos. 6, 9, 19.
21. The Man	Matt. 22:2-14	136	The importance of Christ's righteousness. Cf. Nos. 5-8, 10, 15-17, 25.

Without
a
Wedding
Garment

22. The
Friend
Calling
at
Midnight

[Luke 11:5-13](#)

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E. Prayer

Perseverance in prayer. Asking to give to others.

23. The
Unjust
Judge

[Luke 18:1-8](#)

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Perseverance, earnestness, and confidence in prayer.

F. Humility Versus Pride

24.
Choosing
Places of
Honor

[Luke 14:7-11](#)

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Humility toward one's fellow men; honoring others.

25. The
Pharisee
and
the
Publican

[Luke 18:9-14](#)

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Humility before God; the danger of pride and self-righteousness. Cf. [No. 21](#).

G. Utilizing Present Opportunities

26. The
Nobleman
and
the
Pounds

[Luke 19:11-27](#)

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The improvement of talents and opportunities
Working while waiting for the kingdom.
Faithful service the basis of reward. Cf. Nos. 5, 27, 37.

27. The
Talents

[Matt. 25:14-30](#)

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Same as No. 26; also, helping others prepare for our Lord's return. Cf. Nos. 26, 34, 37.

28. The
Dishonest
Steward

[Luke 16:1-9](#)

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The diligent use of present opportunities in preparation for the future life. Cf. Nos. 26, 27.

29. The
Rich Man
and
Lazarus

[Luke 16:19-31](#)

111

Eternal destiny is decided in the present life; there is no second probation. The danger of preoccupation with material things. Cf. Nos. 7, 18, 40.

H. The Christian and His Fellow Man

30. The
Good
Samaritan

[Luke 10:30-37](#)

91

True religion consists in active service for others; on this, eternal destiny depends. Contact with suffering humanity frees the soul of selfishness. Cf. No. 39.

31. The
Unforgiving
Servant

[Matt. 18:23-35](#)

77

Mercy toward, and forgiveness of, others. Our forgiveness by God contingent on our forgiveness of others. Cf. No. 5.

32.
Treasures
Old and
New

[Matt. 13:52](#)

54

Familiarity with old truths; alertness for new truth. Adapt truth to the needs of the hearers. Cf. No. 9.

33. The
Faithful
Steward

[Luke 12:42-48](#)

99

Conscientious supervision of the affairs of God's household, the church.

I. Awaiting the Lord's Return

34. The Ten Virgins	Matt. 25:1-13	146	Personal preparation for our Lord's return; His coming seemingly delayed. Our need of the Holy Spirit. Cf. Nos. 27, 35, 36.
35. The Watchful Serv-ant	Mark 13:34-37	145	Watching for the Master's return. Cf. Nos. 34, 36.
36. The Watchful Serv-ants; The Vigilant Home Owner	Luke 12:35-40	99	Preparedness for our Lord's sudden return. Living up to the light we have; personal accountability for truth. Cf. Nos. 7, 34, 35.
37. Laborers in the Vineyard	Matt. 20:1-16	122	God measures service by the willingness and fidelity with which it is rendered. Rewards are based on our Lord's gracious generosity and on the spirit which motivates our service for Him. Cf. Nos. 8, 26, 27, 38.
38. Unprofitable Servants	Luke 17:7-10	112	Faithfulness to duty. God's claim on all our services. Cf. No. 37.
39. The Sheep and the Goats	Matt. 25:31-46	148	The significance of practical religion. The supreme test of the reality of our religion is what it leads us to do for others. Cf. No. 30.

J. The Final Judgment; Eternal Rewards

40. The Dragnet	Matt. 13:47-50	54	The final separation of the bad from the good. Not all the wicked eventually become righteous. Cf. Nos. 7, 29.
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V. The Nature and Purpose of Miracles

The Gospel writers refer to the miracles of our Lord by a variety of terms. The most common are *dunamis*, "power," and *sēmeion*, "sign." The former is used when it is desired to characterize the miracle as a manifestation of divine power; the second, as a visible confirmation of Jesus' divine authority. When the reaction of the people is uppermost in the writer's mind he uses *teras*, "wonder," *thaumasion*, "wonderful thing," *endoxon*, "glorious thing," or *paradoxon*, "strange thing." Inasmuch as *teras* was the common word for a "wonder" performed by a magician, New Testament writers always use with it one of the words that mark a genuine miracle as an act of God. Jesus commonly spoke of His miracles as *erga*, "works."

Webster defines our English word "miracle" as "an event or effect in the physical world deviating from the known laws of nature, or transcending our knowledge of these laws; an extraordinary, anomalous, or abnormal event brought about by superhuman agency." The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "miracle" as "a marvellous event occurring within human experience, which cannot have been brought about by human power or by the operation of any natural agency, and must therefore be ascribed to the special intervention of the Deity or of some supernatural being; chiefly, an act (e.g. of healing) exhibiting control over the laws of nature, and serving as evidence that the agent is either divine or is specially favoured by God." The word "miracle" is from the Latin

miraculum, “an object of wonder,” “a wonderful thing,” “a strange thing,” “a marvelous thing,” “a wonder,” “a marvel,” from *mirari*, “to wonder at,” “to be astonished at.”

Our word “miracle” thus specifically designates any occurrence that appears unaccountable because of the finite limitations of human knowledge and understanding. There are no miracles in the sight of God, for His knowledge and understanding are infinite. The miraculous aspect of certain phenomena does not lie so much in the occurrences themselves as in the effect they produce in the minds of finite beings who witness them. The occurrence itself is objective; its miraculous aspect is subjective.

As men’s knowledge and understanding increase, some occurrences they formerly considered miraculous may cease to appear so. For instance, when the art of printing was first invented men generally considered it miraculous and attributed it to the devil. What would men of that time and bent of mind have thought of television? The miracles of our Lord, however, called into operation power wholly unknown to man and produced results that cannot, even today, be explained on the basis of human knowledge.

Nevertheless, what appears to be a violation of natural law as we understand it may simply be the operation of a higher, unknown law of nature that modifies or counteracts a lower, known law. Gravity, for instance, draws all objects earthward. But a higher law of nature counteracts the law of gravity when a living creature lifts those same objects, when the sun lifts tons of moisture into the air to form clouds, or when capillary action lifts sap from the roots of a giant sequoia to its topmost branches. Or, one law may be modified by another, as when centrifugal and centripetal forces operate in balance to maintain a planet in its course. The forces of nature operate according to the expressed will of God, and it is hardly appropriate to consider miracles as violations of natural law. More properly, they are variations from the operation of natural law as known and understood by men. God never works contrary to Himself.

A miracle of healing is no greater than the miracle of a transformed life. In fact, such a life is the greatest of all miracles. In each, God is simply at work in ways we do not fully understand (cf. John 3:8), for our good in this life and in the life to come. There is a spiritual law to the effect that “the wages of sin is death,” but there is also a higher law to the effect that “the gift of God is eternal life” (Rom. 6:23; 7:21 to 8:4). See DA 406, 407.

To see the miracles of our Lord in their true perspective, as related to His mission to this earth, it is necessary to understand something of the purpose that prompted them and the conditions under which they could be effected:

Why did Jesus perform miracles? Every miracle of our Lord served a definite purpose; He never exercised divine power to satisfy idle curiosity or to demonstrate the possession of ability to do so (DA 730), or to benefit Himself (DA 729). “His wonderful works were all for the good of others” (DA 119; cf. 406), and contributed materially and spiritually to their welfare. He sought by this means to assure all men of the love, sympathy, and care of their heavenly Father. Evidence of His work for them, demonstrated in unusual ways, would lead to a better understanding and a deeper appreciation of how He meets their needs in more common ways from day to day (DA 367). See DA 143.

Again, the miracles of our Lord illustrated spiritual truth. The man healed of paralysis in Capernaum was first cured of spiritual paralysis (Mark 2:9–11). The blind man at Siloam enjoyed the restoration of both natural and spiritual eyesight (John 9:5–7, 35–38). The bread provided for the 5,000 was designed to lead their minds to the true Bread of

Life that came down from heaven (John 6:26–35). The raising of Lazarus demonstrated Christ’s power to impart life to all who believe in Him (John 11:23–26; cf. 5:26–29) and His power to inspire new life in those who are spiritually dead. “Every miracle was of a character to lead the people to the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations” (DA 366).

Above all, the miracles of our Lord testified to His divine mission as the Saviour of mankind and attested the truth of His message. Again and again Jesus pointed to His mighty works as evidence of His divine authority and Messiahship (Matt. 11:20–23; John 5:36; 10:25, 32, 37, 38; 14:10, 11), and sincere-hearted men accordingly recognized divinity operating in and through Him (Matt. 13:54; Luke 9:43; 19:37; 24:19; John 3:2; 6:14; 9:16, 33).

Not only did the miracles of Christ contribute in a general way toward the realization of these objectives, but each miracle, at least of those recorded in the Gospels, seems to have been significant in and of itself (see on Luke 2:49). Accordingly, a study of the miracles of our Lord should include an investigation of their results, and thus of the purpose that prompted them, and that led the evangelists to record them (see column, “Purpose and/or Result,” pp. 210–213).

Under what circumstances did Jesus perform miracles? “Christ never worked a miracle except to supply a genuine necessity” (DA 366). God is not honored in being called upon to do that which men are able to do for themselves. Only when men recognize that their needs are beyond human wisdom and skill to supply, can the ultimate purpose of a miracle be realized. Indeed, there must first be a profound sense of need. Next, there must be faith that God can and will supply the help so desperately needed. There must also be an earnest desire, an intense longing, that God will supply this need. There must be readiness of heart and mind to act on faith, in harmony with whatever God may require. Finally, there must be willingness to order the life henceforth in harmony with the principles of the kingdom of heaven, and to bear witness to the love and power of God.

In the following table the miracles of our Lord are listed in chronological order. The Scripture reference given indicates the place in this commentary where major comment appears. Miracles are designated numerically as dealing with: (1) disease and deformity, (2) demon possession, (3) death, (4) the forces of nature. The section in the Harmony of the Gospels (see pp. 196-201) indicated for each miracle leads to other sources of information related to each miracle, such as the maps and charts on which they appear. The column headed “Purpose and/or Result” provides a brief analysis of the special contribution of each miracle to our Lord’s mission on earth. Cross references indicate other miracles comparable as to purpose or result.

THE MIRACLES OF OUR LORD

[For explanation see preceding paragraph.]

Miracle	Major Comment	Harmony Entry	Purpose and/or Result
1. Water Turned Into Wine (4)†	John 2:1-11	23	Purpose: To strengthen the disciples’ faith and to fortify them against the prejudice of priests and rabbis (DA 147, 148). To honor Mary’s trust and to relieve her of perplexity and embarrassment (DA 145-147). To manifest sympathetic interest in human happiness (DA 144).

2. The Nobleman's Son (1)	John 4:43-54	28	Results: Conversion of the nobleman and his family; their witness concerning Jesus in Capernaum. The way prepared in Capernaum for His ministry there (DA 200, 253).
3. The Invalid at Bethesda (1)	John 5:1-15	30	Purpose: To bring the leaders in Jerusalem to a decision (DA 231). Results: A verdict of censure designed to counteract the influence of Jesus, a proclamation branding Him an impostor, a plot to take His life, spies commissioned to secure evidence against Him (DA 204, 213). (First Sabbath miracle.)
4. The Great Catch of Fish (4)	Luke 5:1-11	35	Purpose: To win Peter, Andrew, James, and John to permanent discipleship and make them fishers of men; to provide assurance of provision for their needs (see DA 246, 249).
5. The Demoniac in the Synagogue (2)	Mark 1:21-28	36	Purpose: To inaugurate and publicize the Galilean ministry (see Mark 1:27, 28), and to demonstrate Jesus' mission to free all captives of Satan (MH 91; DA 255; cf. on John 2:16-18). Result: Multitudes thronged Jesus for healing, and spread the news far and wide. (Second Sabbath miracle.)
6. Peter's Mother-in-law (1)	Mark 1:29-31	37	Purpose: To demonstrate God's special love and care for those who, like Peter, devote their lives to the proclamation of the gospel. (Third Sabbath miracle.)
7. The First Healing of Leprosy (1)	Mark 1:40-45	39	Purpose: To demonstrate power over even the most feared malady, popularly supposed to be a divine judgment, and, by implication, to imply the cleansing of the soul from sin. To disarm the priests and scribes of their prejudice by showing respect for the law of Moses. To demonstrate love for humanity. Result: A popular movement that forced Jesus to cease His labors for a time (see Mark 1:45; DA 265).
8. A Paralytic Lowered Through the Roof (1)	Mark 2:1-12	40	Purpose: To demonstrate, especially before the spies present, power to restore men's souls as well as their bodies; to demonstrate God's love for those whom popular prejudice considered hopeless. See DA 267, 270. Results: A profound impression on the people; the Pharisees left "dumb with amazement and overwhelmed with defeat" (DA 270).
9. The Man With a Withered Hand (1)	Mark 3:1-6	43	Purpose: To demonstrate the true purpose of the Sabbath day. Result: The spies conspired with the Herodian party to silence Jesus. (Fourth Sabbath miracle.)
10. The Centurion's Servant (1)	Luke 7:1-10	47	Purpose: To give an example of genuine faith; to show that divine power is not limited by distance; to demonstrate the eligibility of Gentiles for the benefits of the kingdom of heaven.
11. Two Blind Men (1)	Matt. 9:27-31	48	[Not given]

12. A Dumb Demoniac (1-2)	Matt. 9:32-34	49	[Not given]
13. The Widow's Son at Nain (3)	Luke 7:11-17	51	Purpose: To demonstrate divine power over death; to manifest the love of God for those in dire need.
14. A Blind and Dumb Demoniac (1-2)	Matt. 12:22-32	52	Result: The spies attribute the miracles of Jesus to satanic power. He exposes the folly of such reasoning and warns against the unpardonable sin.
15. The Storm on the Lake (4)	Matt. 8:18, 23-27	56	Purpose: To demonstrate divine power over the elements of nature.
16. The Demoniacs of Gadara (2)	Mark 5:1-20	57	Purpose: To demonstrate divine power over the most fearful of demons. Result: The evangelization of Decapolis by the restored demoniacs (see DA 339, 340, 404; see on miracles Nos. 22, 23).
17. The Invalid Woman (1)	Mark 5:25-34	60	Purpose: To make an example of humble, persevering faith.
18. Jairus' Daughter (3)	Mark 5:22-24, 35-43	60	Purpose: To demonstrate divine power over death.
19. Feeding the Five Thousand (4)	Mark 6:30-44	66	Purpose: To manifest sympathetic interest in man's daily needs; to bring the people of Galilee to a decision. Results: A conviction of Jesus' Messiahship; an attempt to crown Jesus king (John 6:14, 15; DA 377, 378). The following day popular sentiment turned against Him (John 6:66; cf. on miracle No. 3).
20. Jesus Walks on the Lake (4)	Matt. 14:22-33	67	Purpose: To subdue the impatient, stormy thoughts of the disciples and teach them to have confidence in the leadership of their Master. When they realized their utter helplessness He came to their rescue.
21. The Syrophenician Woman's Daughter (2)	Matt. 15:21-28	70	Purpose: To teach the disciples that there were sincere persons among the Gentiles, eligible for the benefits of the kingdom of heaven; to contrast the heartless exclusiveness of the Jews with Jesus' own compassion for the Gentiles.
22. The Deaf-mute of Decapolis (1)	Mark 7:31-37	71	Purpose: To provide another example of mercy toward a Gentile, in a Gentile region.
23. Feeding the Four Thousand (4)	Matt. 15:32-39	72	Purpose: To provide for the necessities of those who clung to Jesus' words; to teach the disciples that when the Jews should reject the bread of life it was to be offered to Gentiles.
24. The Blind Man Near Bethsaida (1)	Mark 8:22-26	74	Purpose: To provide another example of mercy toward a Gentile, in a Gentile region.
25. The Demon-possessed Boy (2)	Mark 9:14-29	79	Purpose: To contrast the depths to which Satan debases humanity, with the heights to which God exalts men (Moses and Elijah transfigured

26. The Temple Half Shekel (4)	Matt. 17:24-27	80	the night before). Purpose: To provide evidence of Jesus' divine commission—and thus His rightful claim to exemption from the Temple tax—yet to pay it without argument, by a means that revealed His divinity.
27. The Man Born Blind (1)	John 9:1-41	86	Purpose: To repeat the challenge to the Jewish leaders implied in the miracle at the Pool of Bethesda 18 months previous (see on miracle No. 3); to restore physical sight as an illustration of Jesus' desire to restore spiritual sight to the purblind Jewish leaders (see DA 475; John 9:39-41). Result: Some favored Jesus; a majority became more decided in their rejection of Him (John 10:19-21). (Fifth Sabbath miracle.)
28. The Crippled Woman (1)	Luke 13:10-17	101	Purpose: To focus attention on the true purpose of the Sabbath. (Sixth Sabbath miracle.)
29. The Man With Dropsy (1)	Luke 14:1-4	104	Purpose: To focus attention on the true purpose of the Sabbath. (Seventh Sabbath miracle.)
30. The Raising of Lazarus (3)	John 11:1-45	113	Purpose: To provide the Jewish nation, particularly its leaders—some of whom were present—with incontestable evidence of Jesus' Messiahship (see John 11:4, 42). Results: Many believed; but the majority determined to kill Jesus and Lazarus at the first opportunity (see John 11:45-57; 12:10). This miracle united the Sadducees with the Pharisees in plotting Jesus' death (DA 537, 538).
31. The Ten Lepers (1)	17:11-19	115	Purpose: To demonstrate the faith of a Samaritan, and Jesus' own interest in and sympathy for this race; a lesson to the disciples concerning their obligations to the Samaritans (DA 488).
32. Blind Bartimaeus (Two Blind Men) (1)	Mark 10:46-52	125	Result: An additional evidence of Jesus' Messiahship, witnessed by throngs on their way to Jerusalem to attend the last Passover.
33. The Fruitless Fig Tree (4)	Mark 11:12-14, 20-26	131	Purpose: To provide an object lesson to the disciples of the impending fate of the Jewish nation.
34. Malchus' Ear (1)	Luke 22:50, 51	161	Purpose: To provide a final demonstration of the nature of the Saviour's work for mankind, and a final evidence of His divine power and Messiahship.
35. Second Great Catch of Fish (4)	John 21:1-23	176	Purpose: To remind the disciples of their original call to become fishers of men (see on miracle No. 4), to deepen the impression then made, and to make clear that the death and resurrection of Jesus had in no way altered their responsibility under the gospel

commission (see DA 811).

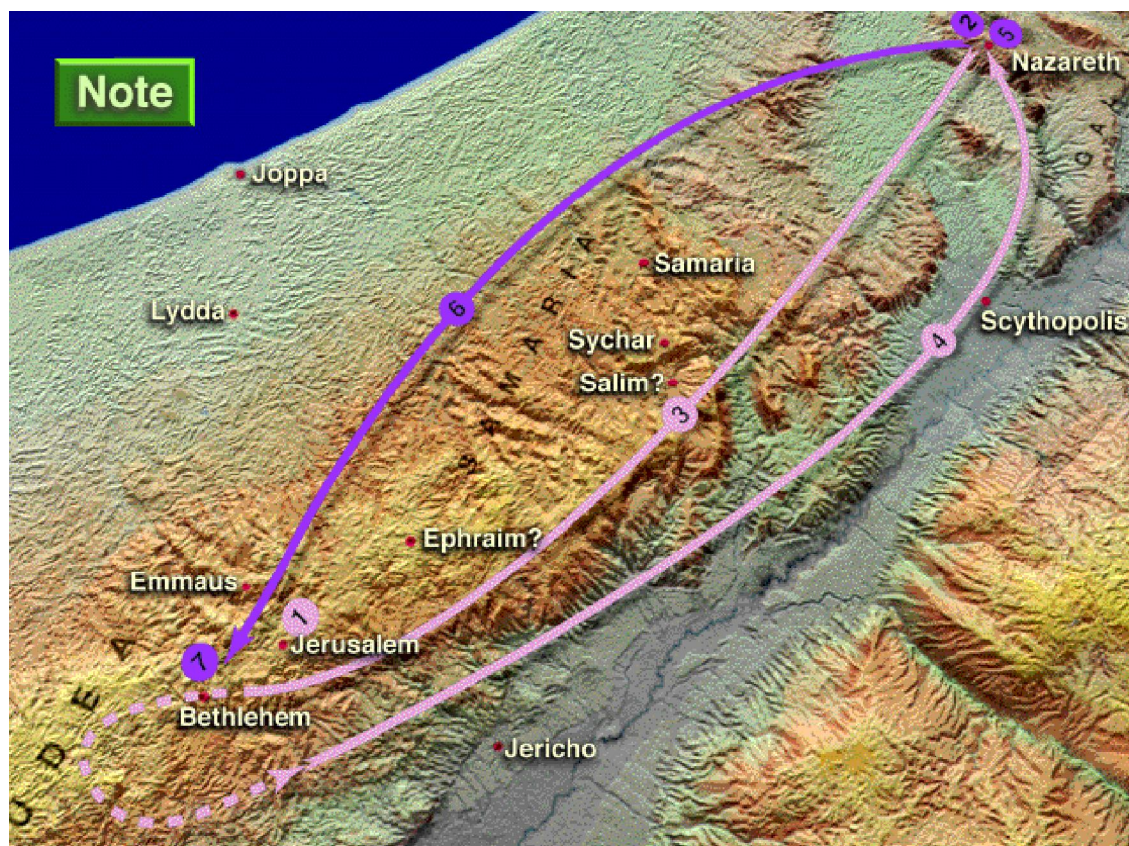
Maps and Charts Illustrating The Life and Ministry of Jesus

The following series of maps on the life and ministry of our Lord represents graphically the chronological sequence of events as set forth in the Harmony of the Gospels (pp. 196–201). It should be remembered, however, that the exact time and location of many incidents are not known. For the principles followed in the construction of the Harmony, and thus also of the maps, see pp. 190–193.

The series of charts following the maps provides a graphic representation of the chronological relationship of events as set forth in the Harmony. Some of the charts illustrate the narrative sequence of events, while others are concerned with chronological problems that arise in a study of the Gospel record.

The Nativity of Jesus

2



Numbers indicate approximate order of events. See p. 192. Arrows indicate direction, but not specific routes, of travel. References within the arrow numbers reflect the Harmony of the Gospels. Question marks indicate uncertain locations. For events following see the Childhood and Youth of Jesus. Compare Synopsis of the Life of Christ, Suggestive Chronology of Christ's Birth, and Palestine Under the Herodians.

3

²Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Mt 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Childhood and Youth of Jesus From Nativity to Manhood



Circled numbers indicate approximate order of events. Arrows indicate direction, but not specific routes, of travel. References within the arrows refer to the Harmony of the Gospels. For preceding events see The Nativity of Jesus, and events following, see Early Ministry of Jesus. Compare Synopsis of the Life of Christ, Suggestive Chronology of Christ's Birth, and Palestine Under the Herodians.

4

Early Ministry of Jesus

³Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

⁴Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



Numbers indicate approximate order of events (see p. 192). Arrows indicate direction, but not specific routes, of travel. References within the arrow numbers reflect the Harmony of the Gospels. Question marks indicate uncertain locations. For preceding events see map showing the Childhood and Youth of Jesus, and events following, and the Judean Ministry from First Passover A.D. 28. Compare The Chronology of Luke, Duration of Christ's Ministry, The Ministry of Our Lord, and Palestine Under the Herodians.

⁵

Judean Ministry of Jesus

⁵Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



Numbers indicate approximate order of events (see p. 192). Arrows indicate direction, but not specific routes, of travel. References within the arrow numbers reflect the Harmony of the Gospels. Question marks indicate uncertain locations. For preceding events see Early Ministry and Baptism to First Passover, and events following, Early Galilean Ministry. Compare Duration of Christ's Ministry, Opening of the Galilean Ministry, and The Ministry of Our Lord. See Palestine During the Ministry of Jesus.

Early Galilean Ministry of Jesus

⁶Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



Numbers indicate approximate order of events (see p. 192). Arrows indicate direction, but not specific routes, of travel. References within the arrow numbers reflect the Harmony of the Gospels. Question marks indicate uncertain locations. For preceding events see Judean Ministry of Jesus, and events following, Middle Galilean Ministry of Jesus. Compare Duration of Christ's Ministry, The Ministry of Our Lord. See Palestine During the Ministry of Jesus.

⁷

Middle Galilean Ministry of Jesus

⁷Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

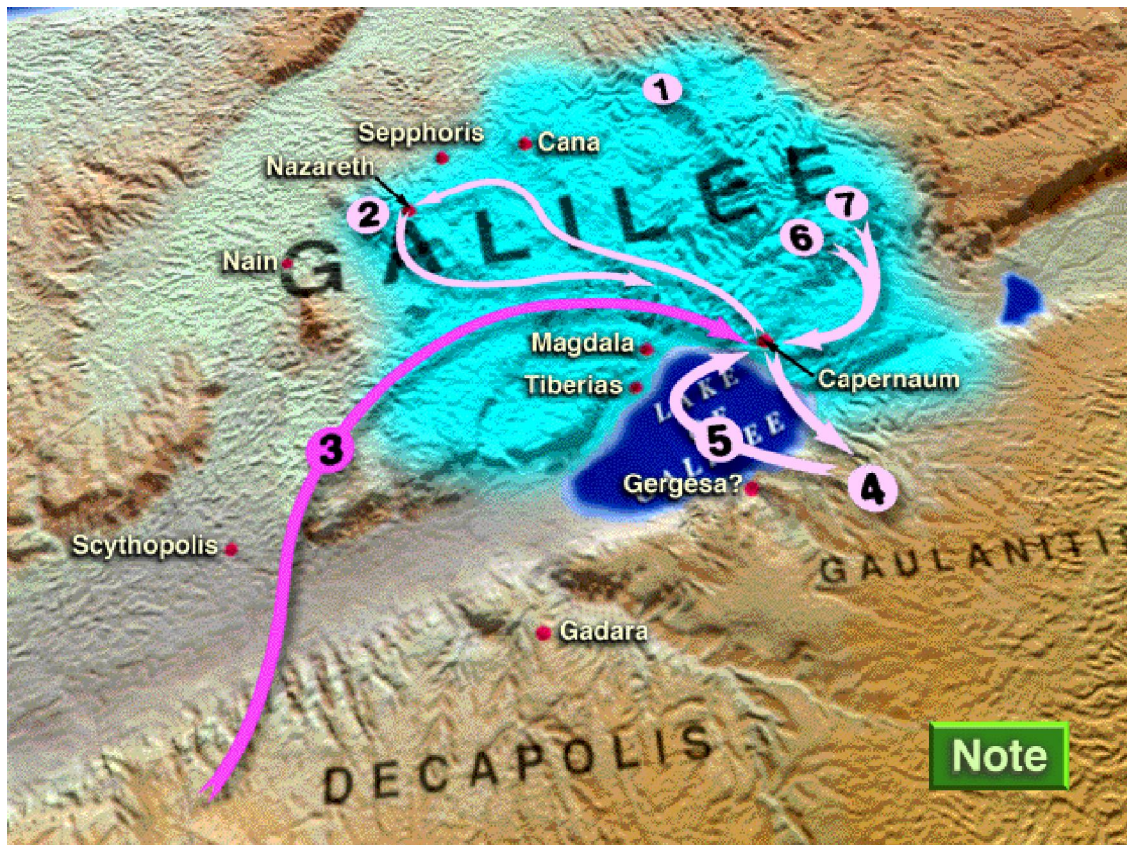


Numbers indicate approximate order of events (see p. 192). Arrows indicate direction, but not specific routes, of travel. References within the arrow numbers reflect the Harmony of the Gospels. Question marks indicate uncertain locations. For preceding events see Early Galilean Ministry of Jesus, and events following, Closing Galilean Ministry of Jesus. Compare Duration of Christ's Ministry, The Ministry of Our Lord. See Palestine During the Ministry of Jesus.

⁸

Closing Galilean Ministry of Jesus

⁸Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



Numbers indicate approximate order of events (see p. 192). Arrows indicate direction, but not specific routes, of travel. References within the arrow numbers reflect the Harmony of the Gospels. Question marks indicate uncertain locations. For preceding events see Middle Galilean Ministry of Jesus, and events following, Jesus' Retirement From Public Ministry. Compare Duration of Christ's Ministry, The Ministry of Our Lord. See Palestine During the Ministry of Jesus.

Jesus' Retirement From Public Ministry

⁹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

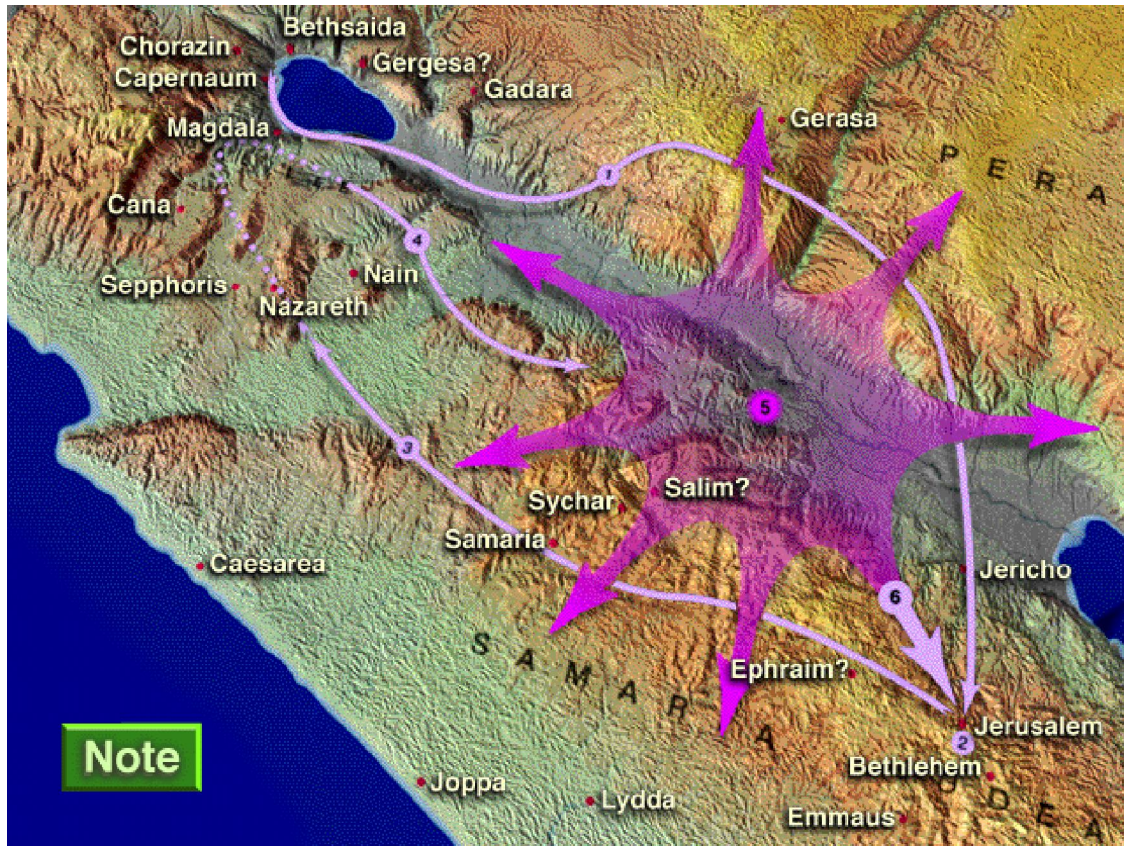


Numbers indicate approximate order of events (see p. 192). Arrows indicate direction, but not specific routes, of travel. References within the arrow numbers reflect the Harmony of the Gospels. Question marks indicate uncertain locations. For preceding events see Closing Galilean Ministry of Jesus, and events following, Early Peraean Ministry of Jesus. Compare Duration of Christ's Ministry, The Ministry of Our Lord. See Palestine During the Ministry of Jesus.

¹⁰

Early Peraean Ministry of Jesus

¹⁰Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



Numbers indicate approximate order of events (see p. 192). Arrows indicate direction, but not specific routes, of travel. References within the arrow numbers reflect the Harmony of the Gospels. Question marks indicate uncertain locations. For preceding events see Jesus' Retirement From Public Ministry, and events following, Closing Peraean Ministry of Jesus. Compare Duration of Christ's Ministry, The Ministry of Our Lord. See Palestine During the Ministry of Jesus.

¹¹

Closing Peraean Ministry of Jesus

¹¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



Numbers indicate approximate order of events (see p. 192). Arrows indicate direction, but not specific routes, of travel. References within the arrow numbers reflect the Harmony of the Gospels. Question marks indicate uncertain locations. For preceding events see Early Peraean Ministry of Jesus, and events following, Closing Ministry of Jesus at Jerusalem. Compare Duration of Christ's Ministry, The Ministry of Our Lord. See Palestine During the Ministry of Jesus.

¹²

Closing Ministry of Jesus at Jerusalem

¹²Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

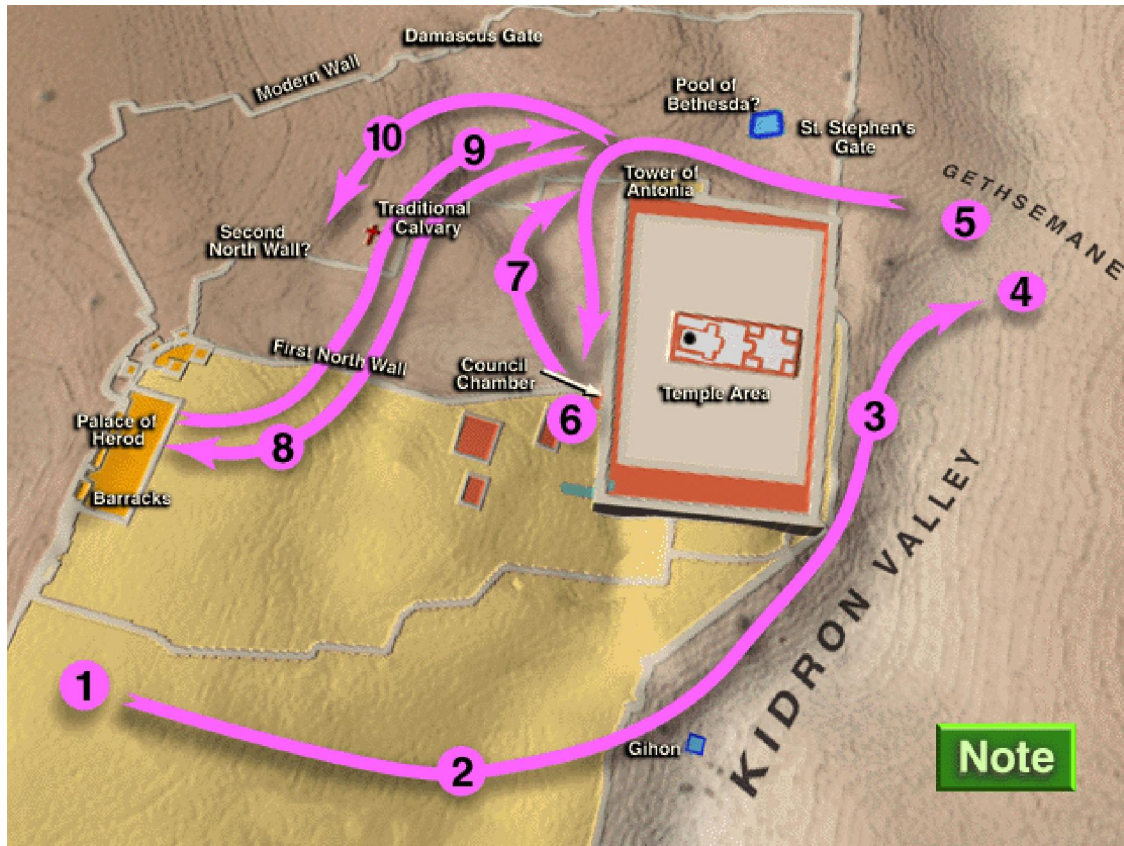


Numbers indicate approximate order of events (see p. 192). Arrows indicate direction, but not specific routes, of travel. Numbers within the arrows refer to the Harmony of the Gospels. Question marks indicate uncertain locations. For preceding events see Closing Peraean Ministry of Jesus, and events following, Betrayal, Trial, and Crucifixion of Jesus. Compare Passion Week. See Jerusalem in the Time of Christ.

¹³

Betrayal, Trial, and Crucifixion of Jesus

¹³Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

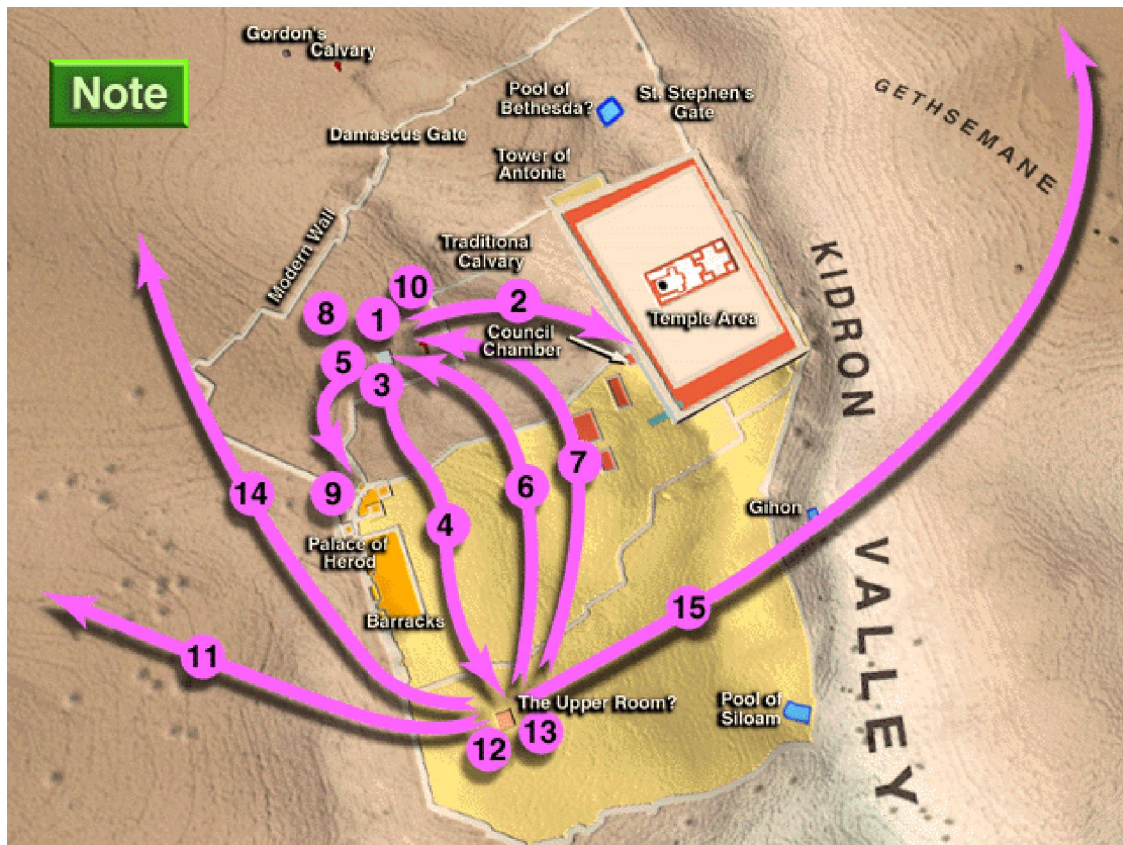


Numbers indicate approximate order of events (see p. 192). Arrows indicate direction, but not specific routes, of travel. Numbers within the arrows refer to the Harmony of the Gospels. Question marks indicate uncertain locations. For preceding events see Closing Ministry of Jesus at Jerusalem, and events following, The Resurrection of Jesus and Subsequent Events. Compare Crucifixion in Relation to Passover, Passion Week, and Palestine Under the Herodians. See Jerusalem in the Time of Christ.

¹⁴

The Resurrection of Jesus and Subsequent Events

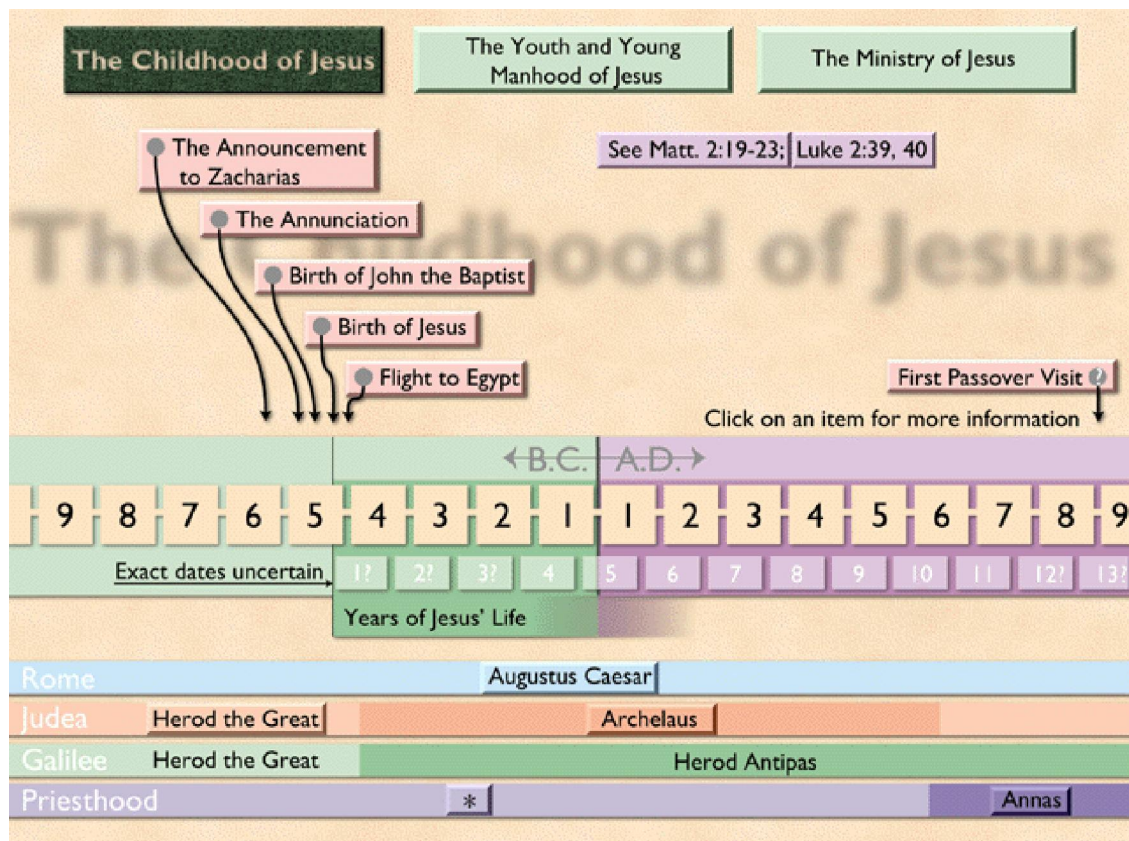
¹⁴Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



Numbers indicate approximate order of events (see p. 192). Arrows indicate direction, but not specific routes, of travel. Numbers within the arrows refer to the Harmony of the Gospels. Question marks indicate uncertain locations. For preceding events see Betrayal, Trial, and Crucifixion of Jesus. Compare Resurrection to Ascension. See Jerusalem in the Time of Christ.

¹⁵

¹⁵Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ge 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.



The Childhood of Jesus

The Youth and Young
Manhood of Jesus

The Ministry of Jesus

See Luke 2:51, 52

The Youth and Young Manhood of Jesus

First Passover Visit

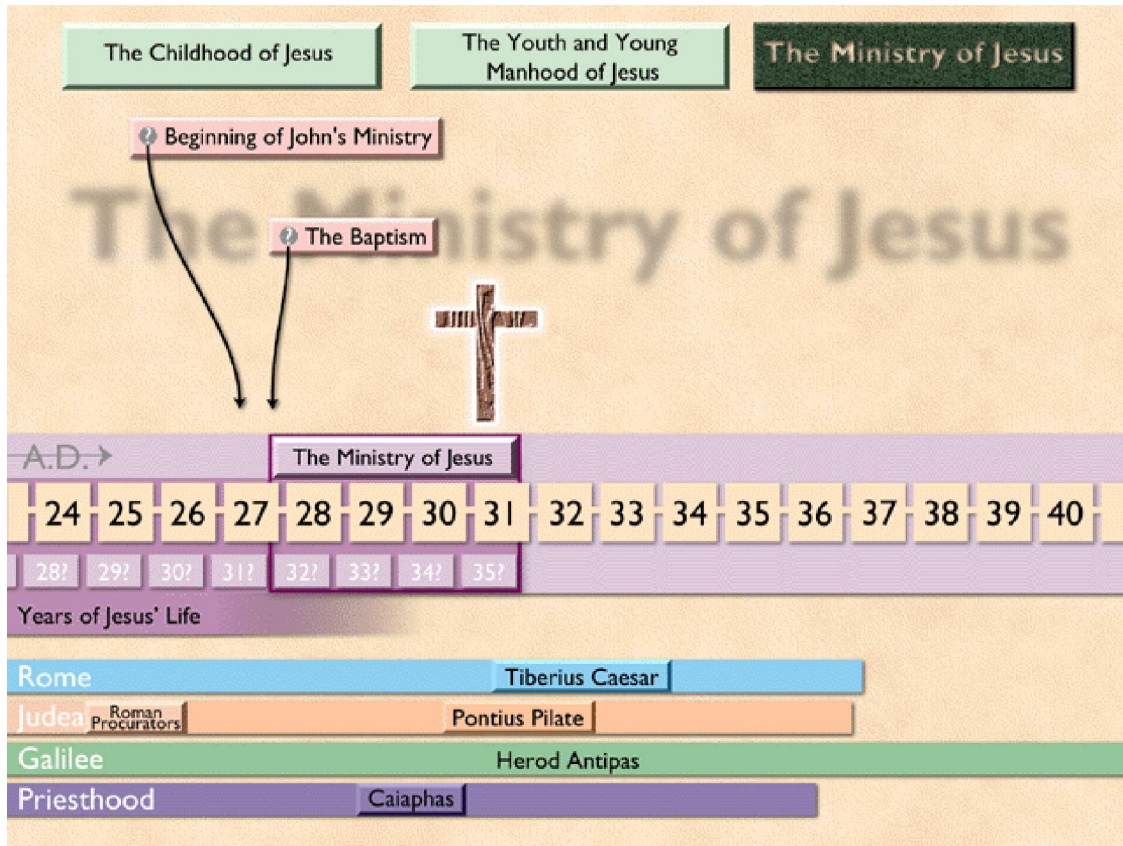


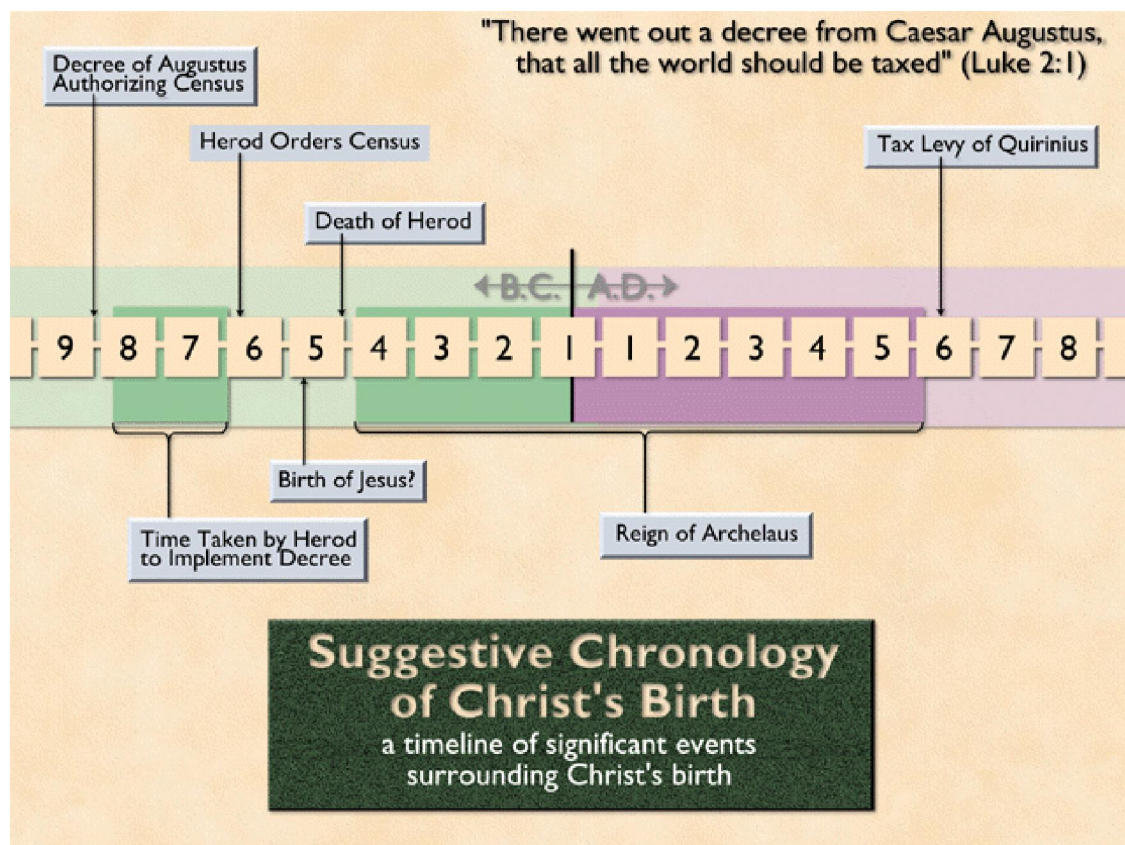
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8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
12?	13?	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29

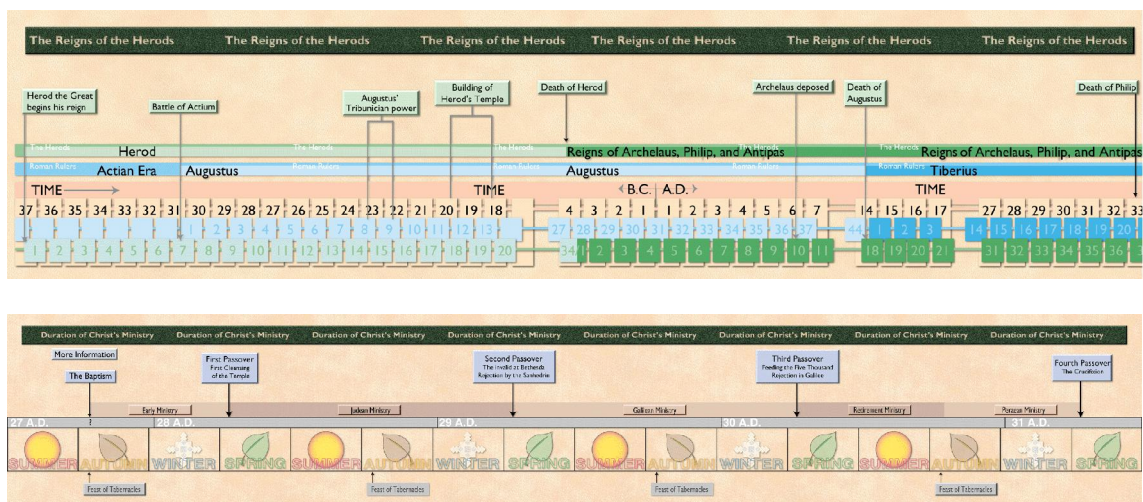
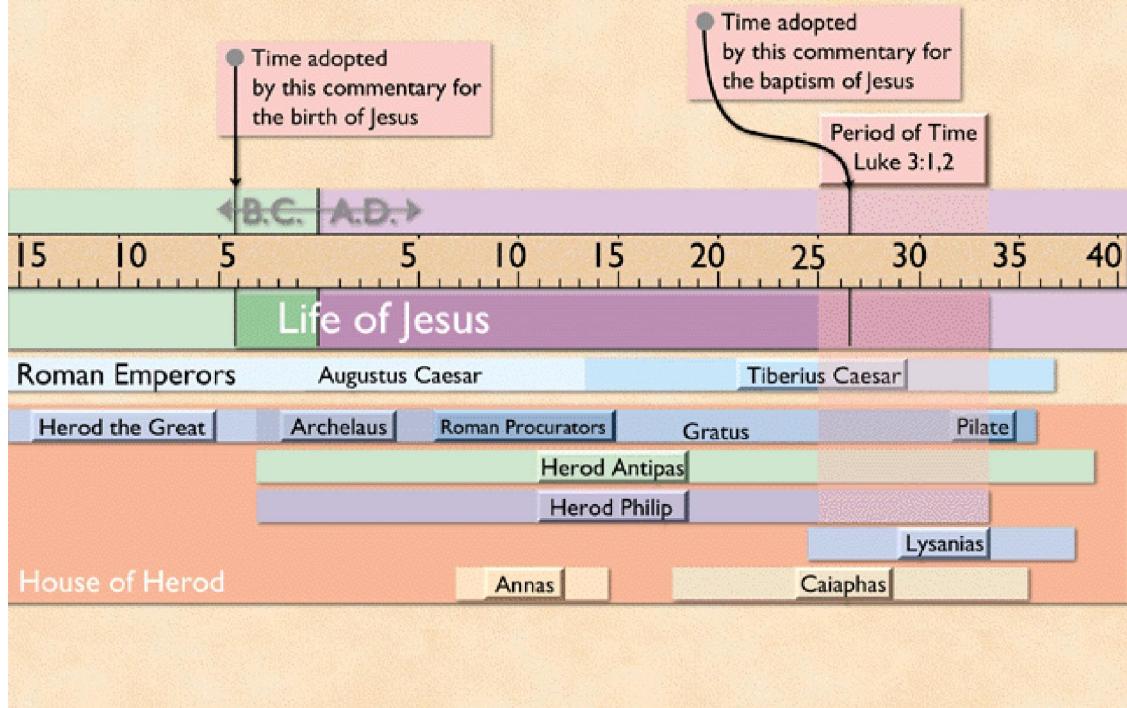
Years of Jesus' Life

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Judea	Roman Procurators	
Galilee	Herod Antipas	
Priesthood	Annas	* Caiaphas

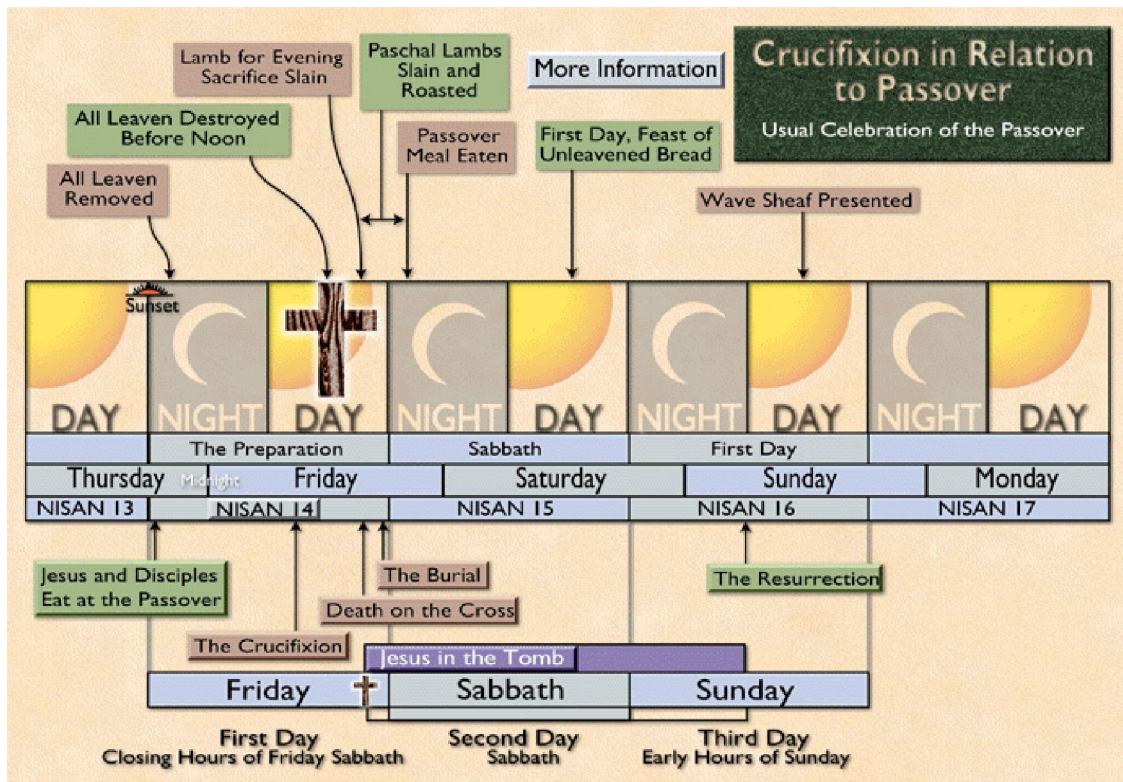
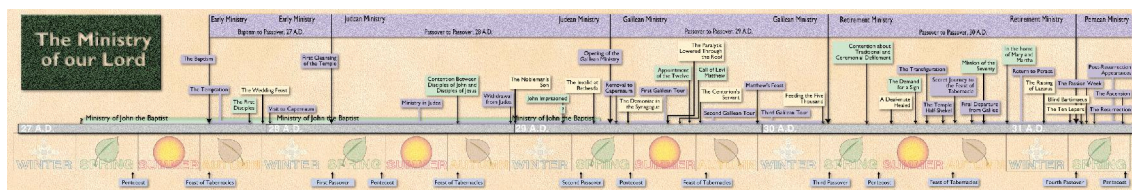
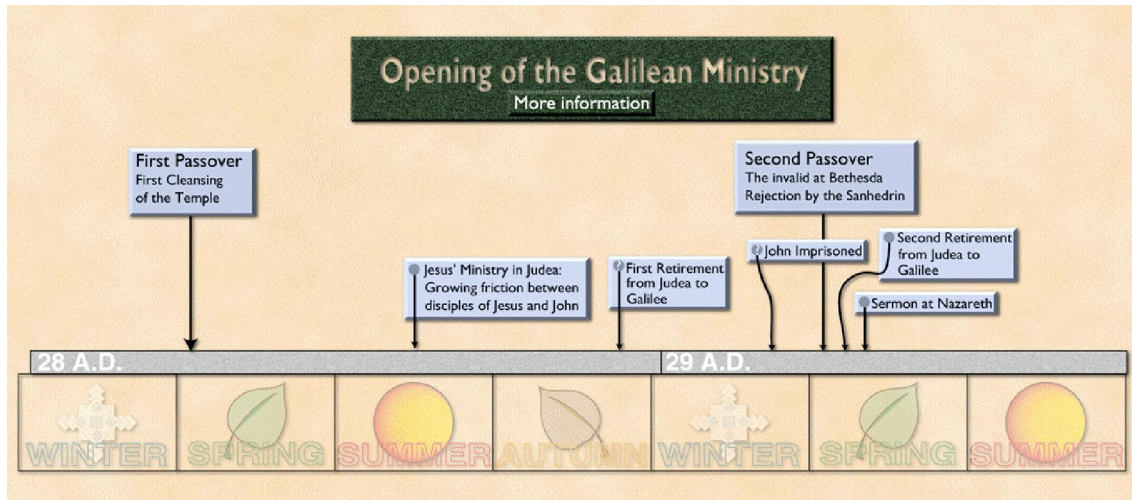


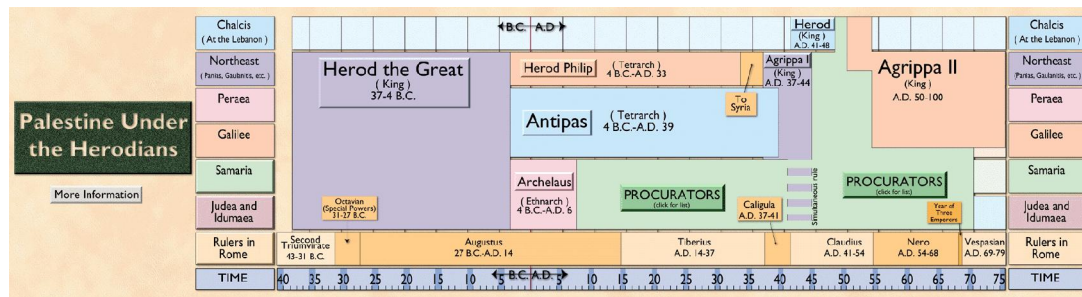
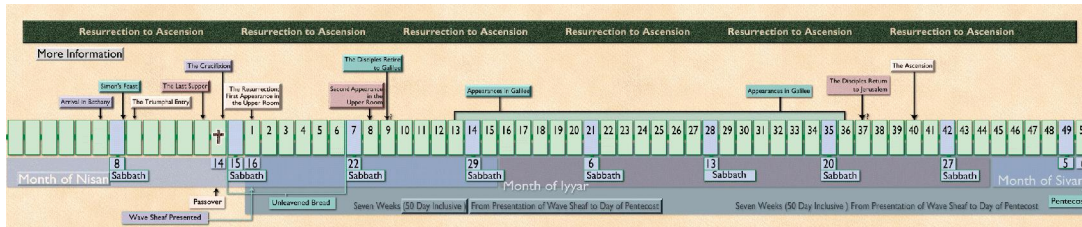
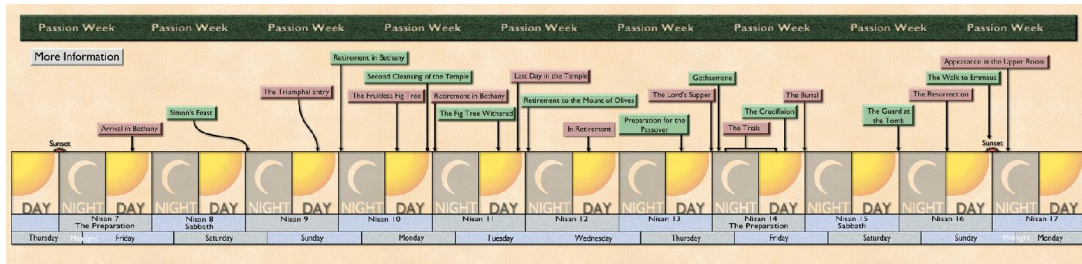


The Chronology of Luke



¹⁶Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Mt 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.





Basis for New Testament Chronology

I. Introduction

THE events recorded in the New Testament occurred in the 1st century of our era—a period for which the chronology of the Roman Empire is well established—yet their dates cannot be settled beyond dispute because the writers did not give us enough information. The only New Testament mention of a specific year (the 15th of Tiberius) has been subject to varying interpretations. The epistles carry no date lines, and the writers of the Gospels were more interested in the meaning of events than in their dating.

Modern scholars sometimes write dogmatically about the chronology of the life of Christ, but their writing is based on subjective interpretations of evidence that is not sufficiently clear to be conclusive. The reader of this commentary will find that although the New Testament writers provide enough in the way of time statements to show that they were in no uncertainty, they do not give us enough on which to reconstruct more than an approximate chronological scheme of events. Even the order of events, pieced together from the four Gospels, is at times uncertain. Allowance must be made for possible variations.

New Testament chronological problems are either internal, concerned with the interpretation of the text itself, or external, concerned with the relation between New Testament events and secular chronology. The purpose of this article is to present the facts that can be known, and to point to the conclusions that may reasonably be reached, on the most important external chronological problems within the scope of Volume V: the B.C.-A.D. dating of (1) the birth of Christ, (2) His baptism, and thus the beginning of

His ministry, and (3) His crucifixion and resurrection. As a preface to this, it is necessary to explain various ancient chronological eras and methods of reckoning years.

II. Calendars and Year Reckonings

The world in which Jesus lived was the Roman Empire of Augustus and Tiberius. In this empire many peoples and nations from the Atlantic to the Euphrates, from the mouth of the Rhine to the cataracts of the Nile, were united under Roman dominion and enjoyed the Roman peace. But in this area, especially in the East, where the civilizations were much older than the civilization of Rome, the local languages, customs, and religions still persisted. And so did the various methods of reckoning time. Even in official matters dates were expressed in terms of the regnal and calendar reckoning of the local area.

Varying Calendars in First Century A.D.—The Roman calendar had been changed under the authority of Julius Caesar from lunar to solar at the beginning of the year 45 B.C. That is, the Roman months, formerly lunar, had been adjusted by Sosigenes, an astronomer from Egypt, to the Egyptian 365-day solar year, with the addition of an extra day every four years, thus making the year average 365 1/4 days. But this Julian calendar, which eventually became the heritage of all Europe, was not imposed uniformly throughout the whole Roman Empire (see Vol. I, pp. 176, 177; Vol. II, p. 118).

In Egypt itself Augustus introduced the leap-year system, with the result that the Egyptian New Year's Day, Thoth 1, ceased to slip backward through the seasons as it had always done (see Vol. I, p. 176; Vol. II, pp. 104, 154) and became fixed to August 29 (or 30 in some years). Otherwise the Egyptian calendar remained the same, with its twelve 30-day months under the old names, and the five extra days at the end (thenceforth six every fourth year).

The provinces east of Egypt kept their lunar calendars of 12 and 13 months (see Vol. II, pp. 103, 104), but during the early centuries of Roman occupation most of them adopted from Rome the year of 365 (366) days, and adapted their own Macedonian and Semitic lunar-month names to the Julian months of 31, 30, or 28 (29) days. Thus in Syria, for example, the Semitic calendar year began with the equivalent of Tishri, which was changed from a lunar month to one of 31 days, coinciding with the Julian October. It is not known to what extent this change had taken place in the 1st century of the Christian Era.

The Jewish Calendar.—The Jews, however, kept their lunar calendar with its months of 30 and 29 days, its year of 12 or 13 months, and its two beginnings of the year: the religious year, from Nisan to Nisan, in the spring, and the civil year from Tishri to Tishri, in the autumn (see Vol. II, pp. 102-104, 109, 116). In Christ's time, however, the ecclesiastical year, beginning in the spring, seems also to have been the regnal year (see p. 238), that is, the year by which the reigns of the local Jewish (quasi-Jewish) Herodian kings were numbered.

The Jews, like the other ancient Semites, had a lunisolar calendar, that is, lunar months with a periodical adjustment to keep the calendar year in step with the seasons. Twelve lunar months total about 11 days less than the true solar year, which governs the seasons. Therefore an extra month (called an embolismic, or intercalary, month) was added every two or three years—Adar, the 12th month, was followed by a 13th month, Adar II. This was necessary to keep Nisan, the 1st month, in line with the barley harvest season (early April), to permit the offering of the wave sheaf (the omer) just after the Passover, during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (see Vol. II, pp. 100, 101, 103-105). The

Babylonians had developed a calendar cycle in the 4th century B.C. that employed a different method of inserting extra months; they doubled their 12th month, *Addaru*, six times in every 19-year cycle; but in one year (now numbered the 17th) they doubled *Ululu* (Jewish Elul), the 6th month (see Vol. II, pp. 112-114).

The Jews, so far as is known, never at any time inserted an Elul II after the 6th month. Such a procedure would have produced an irregular interval between the festivals that the Levitical law prescribed in the 1st and 7th months. Further, the fact that the need for the extra month was governed by the relation of mid-Nisan to the barley harvest indicates that originally, when the calendar presumably depended solely on observation, the 13th month would necessarily be inserted in the spring, just preceding Nisan, and there is no reason to suppose a change to doubling the 6th month. Nothing is known of a regularly recurring Jewish 19-year cycle, like that of the Babylonian calendar, in Jesus' day. Yet there seems to be evidence that the priestly officials who regulated the calendar had some knowledge of methods of theoretical calculation, although they always observed the ancient custom of announcing the months on the basis of actual observation of the moon and of the seasons. According to tradition, it was not until some centuries after Christ that the rabbis systematized their calendar on the basis of fixed rules of calculation known to all.

Roman Methods of Designating Years.—The Romans, with their republican heritage, did not date by the years of their emperors' reigns, for the simple reason that in Italy and the West an emperor was not regarded as a reigning monarch. Augustus, the organizer of the Roman Empire that replaced the republic, was called the *princeps*, literally the first, or chief (citizen), and his rule was not technically a monarchy but a principate. The equivalent Greek terms *hēgemōn* and *hēgemonia* for the emperor and his rule were used in the Eastern provinces, where Greek was the official governmental language, a heritage from Alexander and the Hellenistic kingdoms. We rightly call Augustus the first Roman emperor, and we think of the emperors as monarchs, which in actual practice they were. But their power stemmed from their holding the office of imperator, commander of the armed forces (whence the later term "emperor"). Legally they ruled by virtue of the powers of various civil offices that were originally voted to Augustus and were, in form, voted to each succeeding emperor. Not until the time of Diocletian (A.D. 284–305) was the Roman government formally reorganized as an absolute monarchy.

In ordinary dating the Romans used the formula "in the consulship of—and—," naming each year after the two consuls, the joint chief magistrates of the republic, who were elected yearly. Under the empire the consuls still held office (as mere figureheads) annually, from January 1. Surviving consular lists enable us to locate such consular years in the B.C. and A.D. scale. Until 23 B.C. Augustus legalized his control of the state by holding the consulship every year (with various "colleagues" who actually had no power). At first he reckoned his years by the number of times he had been consul. Then he relinquished the consulship and changed to what became the official method of designating the years of an emperor—by the number of years he had held the tribunician power, that is, the power (though not the office) of tribune (on the tribunes as protectors of the rights of the people under the republic, see p. 27). Such years were reckoned as beginning on the anniversary of the first bestowal of the tribunician power. (The Romans,

unlike the Orientals, attached importance to personal birthdays and were more accustomed to reckoning from anniversaries; the Easterners were inclined to reckon full calendar years, from New Year's Days.)

Regnal Years Used in the East.—In the Eastern provinces and dependent kingdoms of the Roman Empire the custom of dating by the numbered calendar years of each reign had so long prevailed that the peoples of the East continued to apply this method, in their respective local calendars, to Roman emperors.

The local differences are apparent in the case of Augustus, since the setting up of his rule over the empire was not a single event accomplished in a day. We today generally date his reign from 27 B.C. because in January of that year he was given the honorific name of Augustus and his chief constitutional powers were voted to him by the Senate. But in the East his rule was dated from his conquests there. In Syria and neighboring provinces it was regarded as beginning in 31 B.C. with the Battle of Actium on September 2, the decisive point at which he won control of the empire by his defeat of Antony. In Egypt his reign was counted from the death of Cleopatra in 30 B.C., for he was regarded as her successor, by right of conquest, as king of Egypt. There his reign was reckoned by Egyptian calendar years from Thoth 1, 30 B.C.

A regnal-year dating formula, such as that used by Luke, "the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius"—a phrase apparently never used by Tiberius himself in Rome—would depend for its meaning on the particular local calendar used by the writer; that is, on whether he was counting the year from the Egyptian Thoth 1 (always, after the time of Augustus, in August), or from the Jewish Nisan or Tishri, etc. During and after the Hellenistic period local Syrian calendars varied even from city to city.

Two Methods of Numbering Regnal Years.—The date would depend also on which of two methods was used in numbering the regnal years. By one method the unexpired portion of the calendar year after the king's death was called the *accession year* of the new king; the year 1 of the new reign was the first full calendar year, beginning with the next local New Year's Day after the accession. This was the so-called *accession-year* method, sometimes known as *postdating*. This system of numbering had been employed in earlier centuries in Babylonia, Assyria, and the kingdom of Judah, also among the postexilic Jews in Nehemiah's day (see Vol. II, pp. 120, 138, 139; Vol. III, p. 101). But it had been discontinued, even in Babylonia, at the Macedonian conquest, when the years of Alexander the Great began to be numbered by another method (already long known in Egypt)—the so-called *antedating*, or *non-accession-year* system. By this reckoning the calendar year that had begun as the last year of the old reign ended as the year 1 of the new king, and thus carried two numbers. The incoming ruler's year 1 extended from the date of accession to the first New Year's Day following, at which time year 2 began (see Vol. II, pp. 138, 139).

Jewish Methods of Dating.—For the New Testament, the Jewish reckoning of years is important, but nothing is known of Jewish dating from contemporary 1st-century dated documents comparable with the tablets we have in such abundance from an earlier period in Mesopotamia. Palestinian coins carrying regnal-year numbers of Roman emperors are known, but there is no double dating or other synchronism (see Vol. II, p. 135; Vol. III, p. 88) by which the B.C. or A.D. Julian year can be located. However, the only available indications, from Jewish literature, imply that in the time of Christ the regnal years of the local Jewish kings were reckoned from the spring. This may seem strange, in view of the

earlier fall-to-fall year of the kings of Judah and of the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (see Vol. II, pp. 134, 140, 146; Vol. III, pp. 102-105). However the spring-beginning year (of the Seleucid Era) seems to have been used in the time of the Maccabees (see p. 25, note 2), probably in distinction from the fall-to-fall Macedonian reckoning of the Seleucid Era years. The newly independent Jewish rulers, the so-called Maccabeans, were not of the ancient royal line of Judah. They were Hasmonaeans of the tribe of Levi, and were priest-kings. It would be natural that they should emphasize the religious year, beginning Nisan 1, in the spring, rather than the old Judahite regnal year. Consequently it is not surprising to find Josephus, writing in the 1st century, reckoning the years of Herod the Great, the successor of the Hasmonaeans, from the spring, and also by the so-called non-accession-year method. Nor is it surprising to find the tradition of the same method preserved in the Talmud, which states that Nisan 1 was the New Year for Israelite kings (but Tishri 1, in the autumn, for foreign kings as reckoned by the Jews). Just as the Jews of the time of 1 Maccabees seem to have used their own spring-to-spring reckoning in contrast with the fall-to-fall years of the Syrian kings, so presumably they would also follow the same distinction between the years of the local Herods, who were at least nominally Jews, and those of the Roman emperors, who were foreign.

Roman and Greek Traditional Eras.—Historians in the Roman Empire dated events in two traditional eras whose starting points were placed at much earlier but actually unknown dates:

The Greek Olympiads were four-year periods marked off by the quadrennial Olympic games, starting from the supposed origin of the games in the summer of 776 B.C. The 3d year of the 195th Olympiad, for example (abbreviated Ol. 195.3), corresponds to A.D. 3/4, midsummer to midsummer.

The Roman A.U.C. reckoning (*ab urbe condita*, “from the founding of the city”), dating from the supposed year of the founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus, was not unanimously agreed upon by Roman writers; but the commonly accepted authority, Varro, placed the founding of the city in what corresponds to 753 B.C. Although the exact date was supposed to have been April 21, the years A.U.C. are sometimes reckoned by Roman calendar years from January 1. This era, like the Olympiads, was frequently used in historical statements, but ordinary Roman dating was by the consulships (see p. 237).

Eastern Eras in Use in Time of Christ.—In the easternmost region of the Roman Empire the Seleucid Era, begun by the Seleucid kings, was reckoned from the autumn of 312 B.C. by the official Macedonian calendar, though in Babylonia it was always counted from the Babylonian New Year in the spring of 311, and possibly by the Jewish writer of 1 Maccabees from the spring of 312 (see p. 25, note 2). There were several eras of Augustus. One was the Actian Era, dated from the victory of Augustus (then Octavian) at Actium, September 2, 31 B.C. This era was carried on after Augustus’ death, so that in the reign of Tiberius we find coins minted for a few years in Antioch and its neighboring port of Seleucia bearing double dates, in the Actian Era and in regnal years of Tiberius. The Egyptians had another era of Augustus, counted from Thoth 1, 30 B.C., reckoning his regnal years as king of Egypt after the death of Cleopatra. Some also count an Augustan Era from 27 B.C., when the constitutional rule of Augustus began.

The Christian Era.—The Christian Era does not belong historically in a discussion of the 1st century, because it was not invented until centuries later. However, since it is purportedly a reckoning from the birth of Christ and the very phrase “1st century” is

expressed in terms of this era, and since all New Testament events (except the Nativity) are dated in it by modern writers, the era must be explained. In the 6th century after Christ a monk named Dionysius Exiguus devised a new Easter table, in which he introduced a new method of numbering the years. Placing the birth of Christ, according to the best information he had access to, in the Roman year A.U.C. 754, he began his new scale of years “in the year of our Lord” (Latin *Anno Domini nostri*; more often, omitting the word for “our,” *Anno Domini*, or A.D.) 532. The era did not come into general use for ordinary dating until some centuries later, but it is now worldwide, familiar even in Moslem and Far Eastern nations that still retain their old calendars. It has long been known that Dionysius fixed on the wrong year for the birth of Christ, but the usefulness of the scale is unimpaired so long as we understand that A.D. 1956, for example, was not the 1956th year from the birth of Christ, but the 1956th of the artificial scale called the Christian Era, whose starting point is several years later than the true date of the Nativity. Authorities differ as to the exact amount of the error, but it is certainly not less than about four years, and the Christ’s birth must therefore be given a “before Christ” date.

III. The Date of Christ’s Birth

Traditional Date.—Probably the most prevalent date assigned to the birth of Christ has been 4 (or 5) B.C., although some date it in 6, 8, or even earlier. The popularity of 4 B.C. probably stems from Ussher, who considered that the Christian Era was four years late. He placed his creation date at 4004 B.C. because he believed that Christ was born in the year 4000 from the creation of the world, that is 5/4 B.C., fall to fall. Thus he placed the date of the Nativity near the end of 5 B.C., and this year has appeared in the margins of many editions of the English Bible for 250 years. But it is now known that Ussher’s dates, compiled 300 years ago, are far from accurate. Many of them are approximately correct, but many more are entirely misleading. Newer discoveries in archeology have made it possible to know many ancient dates with a certainty that was beyond the reach of scholars of Ussher’s day. Now 5 B.C. can be regarded as approximately correct for the birth of Christ. However, the evidence is not complete enough to furnish proof of the exact year, as will become evident.

Enrollment in the Time of Quirinius (Cyrenius).—Luke tells us that Jesus was born at the time of a census decreed by Augustus, and that it was “the first enrollment, when Quirinius [Cyrenius, KJV] was governor of Syria” (Luke 2:2, RSV). Josephus names Sentius Saturninus and Quintilius Varus as successive governors from about 9 B.C. until after the death of Herod (*Antiquities* xvi. 9. 1; xvii. 5. 2; 9. 3). Therefore critics have charged Luke with an error. However, the evidence does not rule out the probability that Christ was born at the time of the census conducted during Quirinius’ governorship. Two inscriptions mentioning Quirinius have been interpreted by some to indicate that he was joint governor of Syria before the death of Herod, and that the census referred to by Luke was one conducted in 8 or 6 B.C., not the one in the later governorship of Quirinius, A.D. 6 (see Caird in the bibliography at the end of this article). Others prefer to explain Luke’s census as one that had been ordered by Augustus in 8 B.C., and begun in Palestine somewhat later (at which time Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem), then left unfinished at Herod’s death, and completed under Quirinius (and therefore associated with the latter’s name).

Josephus states that Cyrenius undertook a Roman census of Judea in about A.D. 6 or 7 (*Antiquities* xviii. 1. 1; 2. 1; xx. 5. 2), and mentions an insurrection led by Judas of

Galilee in opposition to it. Acts 5:37 refers to the same uprising. This census came soon after Archelaus was deposed and Judea was formally annexed to the Roman province of Syria in A.D. 6. Taken together, these facts suggest the possibility that Jewish antagonism had made it impossible to complete the census (and tax levy based on it) under Herodian rule, and that as soon as Judea was incorporated into the province of Syria the census and tax levy were duly carried out. See the Suggestive Chronology of Christ's Birth.

It has been objected that there is no record of any imperial decree for taxation in Judea prior to that carried out by Quirinius in A.D. 6 or 7, but it must be remembered that detailed records of the Roman administration of Palestine are lacking. Though tributary to Rome, Herod and Archelaus exercised a considerable degree of independence in local affairs, and it is more than likely that they levied taxes in their own names and paid tribute to Rome out of their own coffers. It is entirely possible that Herod, belatedly perhaps, may have carried out a registration called for somewhat earlier by Augustus. Such a decree, though actually issued in Herod's name, could properly be considered a Roman edict inasmuch as Herod was subject to Caesar. Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem, their ancestral home, to be registered. The empire permitted a census to be taken by local methods. That such a practice was sometimes followed in the East is demonstrated by a papyrus of a century later, showing that in Egypt the people were required to return to their homes to enroll in the census (see Caird in the bibliography).

Star Cannot Be Dated.—All attempts to arrive at a date for the star of Bethlehem (Matt. 2:2) by astronomical calculations are worthless. No natural heavenly body could have led the travelers from the east and then have turned south from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and finally stood over a single house. Obviously the star was miraculous (see DA 60) and nonastronomical.

Death of Herod Dated in 4 B.C.—Josephus dates Herod's death in the 37th year of his reign counted from his appointment, or the 34th counted from his actual acquisition of the kingdom, that is, 4/3 B.C., Nisan to Nisan. Some have supposed that Herod died late in 4/3, and thus have placed the birth of Jesus in the autumn of 4 B.C. or later, but the more generally accepted interpretation of Josephus' narrative is the view that Herod died in the first few days of Nisan, 4 B.C. It is explained elsewhere that if Herod died in early April, 4 B.C., the events between the birth of Christ and the slaughter of the infants of Bethlehem, while Herod was still alive, would put the Nativity in early 4 B.C. at the very latest, perhaps some months earlier, in the autumn of 5 B.C. (see on Matt. 2:1; also the Suggestive Chronology of Christ's Birth). It could not have been far from either 5 or 4 B.C., for Jesus was "about thirty years of age" when He began His ministry in the "fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius."

IV. Beginning of Christ's Ministry

The chief chronological statement for the beginning of Christ's ministry is Luke 3:1, 2. Before discussing this important text, two other phrases, one expressed definitely as a round number and the other apparently so, will be considered first.

"About Thirty Years of Age."—Luke says (ch. 3:23) literally that "Jesus himself was beginning about thirty years of age." This has been most often interpreted, from Tyndale down to the present time, as Jesus' age when He began His ministry; that is, that "Jesus himself was beginning," is to be understood as "Jesus was, when He began," about thirty. (See Luke's use of the same construction with the same word for "beginning" in Acts 1:22). It is true that if Jesus was born, at the latest, in 4 B.C., He would have

completed His 30th year in A.D. 27. But aside from the uncertainty of the exact Biblical method of counting age, the Greek word *hōsei*, “about,” here indicates a round number. Jesus would certainly be “about thirty” within range of at least a year or two in one direction or the other. If Luke, who gave us a more detailed narrative than the other Gospel writers, had been informed of Jesus’ exact age, he would hardly have been content with the vague phrase “about thirty.” Jesus’ precise birth date and His exact age at the time of His baptism are not at all necessary to determine the date of the beginning of His ministry. It has been suggested that Luke meant to indicate that Jesus was at least thirty, that is, at the age when He might be considered ready to begin a lifework of leadership (see on Luke 3:23).

The Forty-six Years of the Temple.—The attempt has sometimes been made to derive the date of Christ’s ministry from the statement that “forty and six years was this temple in building” (John 2:20). This was not a historian’s considered statement of chronology, written after a consultation of the records. It was part of an oral rejoinder. The intention of the speaker was not to relate a historical fact, but to heap scorn on the supposedly preposterous claim of Jesus that He could rebuild the Temple in three days. The figure may have been exact; it was just as likely an approximation. Certainly no starting point or ending point was indicated. Therefore it is not to be classed as a precise chronological datum from which to calculate a date.

However, a period of 46 years from the time of the building of Herod’s Temple can be computed as a reasonably close approximation. The Temple was begun, says Josephus, in the 18th year of Herod’s reign (*Antiquities* xv. 11. 1). Elsewhere he gives the 15th year (*War* i. 21. 1 [401]). Some regard these dates as the same year in the two reckonings of Herod’s reign (from his appointment by the Romans in 40 B.C. and from his actual taking control of Judea in 37 B.C.). However, others regard *Antiquities* as correcting an earlier error in *War*. Still others suggest that Herod may have begun preparations three years before he began actual building operations; or that the 46 years are to be counted from the end of the first stage, when the completion of the Temple building, exclusive of the court and other buildings, was celebrated by a great festival (*Antiquities* xv. 11. 6). If we take the 15th year of the reign, 23/22 B.C., the interval is 49 years to the earliest possible reckoning of the 15th year of Tiberius. However, if the starting point was the beginning of the construction in the 18th year, 20/19 B.C. (in January, 19 B.C., probably, since the first year and a half of building ended in midsummer, with the celebration on the anniversary of Herod’s acquisition of the throne), then 46 full years ended in A.D. 28. And it was a few months later, at the Passover of that year, according to the earliest possible interpretation of the 15th year of Tiberius, that the 46-year statement was made. Obviously, in view of the lack of an exact starting point, and of the casual nature of the remark, this 46-year statement cannot be regarded as establishing any date conclusively.

Much more specific and detailed is Luke’s chronological statement obviously intended to date the beginning of Christ’s ministry. This will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Luke’s Dating Formula.—The same chapter that contains the phrase “about thirty years of age” (Luke 3:23), contains the only definite regnal-year date in the New Testament: John the Baptist came from the wilderness “into all the country about Jordan, preaching,” just preceding the baptism of Jesus, in “the fifteenth year of the reign of

Tiberius Caesar” (Luke 3:3, 1). Luke also places this event during the administration of Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26–36), of Herod (Antipas) (4 B.C.-A.D. 39), of Philip (4 B.C.-A.D. 33/34), and Lysanias (exact dates unknown, but about this time), and the priesthood of Annas (c. A.D. 6–14) and Caiaphas (c. A.D. 18–36). This combination of dates assigns the date of Luke’s event to A.D. 26–34 (see The Chronology of Luke 3:1, 2). But only the 15th year of Tiberius can limit it to a specific year.

“The Fifteenth Year of the Reign of Tiberius.”—The identification of this regnal year depends on Luke’s method of dating, since the years of an emperor’s reign were counted by various subject peoples in their own differing local calendars, not by a uniform official reckoning. Officially, Tiberius, like Augustus, was *princeps* (Gr. *hēgemōn*) and imperator, never king, and “the fifteenth year of the reign” (of the *hēgemonia*) was not a Roman dating formula at all. The Roman date would likely have been expressed as the 29th (or 30th) year of Tiberius’ tribunician power, or as a consular year (see p. 237). Luke’s phrase was an Eastern one, current in the provinces that had formerly reckoned their dates by the regnal years of their own kings and overlords, each in its own calendar (see pp. 236-238, 245). What calendar year did Luke use? Did he count as Tiberius’ year 1 the year in which the king came to the throne, or the first full calendar year beginning at the next New Year’s Day? Did he count the beginning of the reign from Augustus’ death or from a coregency beginning earlier? We must know all this in order to answer the question: What did Luke mean when he said “fifteenth year”? Unfortunately we do not know all this. From the source evidence available the answer can have, at best, only a high probability of accuracy.

Coregency of Tiberius With Augustus.—Some authorities have sought to count Luke’s 15th year of Tiberius from one of several points before the death of Augustus. It is well known that Tiberius held numerous high offices in Roman civil and military administration while Augustus was still living. In 6 B.C. he was invested with the tribunician power jointly with Augustus for five years. Then in A.D. 4 he was adopted as Augustus’ son and heir, and given the joint tribunician power for ten years (June 27 A.D. 4), which power was renewed in A.D. 13, presumably for ten years more. In order to assure the succession, Augustus made him joint ruler in the administration of the provinces. Says a contemporary writer: “At the request of his father that he should have in all the provinces and armies a power equal to his own, the senate and the Roman people so decreed” (Velleius Paterculus, ii. 121. 1, 2; Loeb ed., p. 307). The difficulty is that there is disagreement as to whether this joint rule began in A.D. 11, 12, or 13. If, as some have argued, Luke’s word for “reign” (*hēgemonia*) was intended to mean Tiberius’ coregency as contrasted with his sole reign, there is no evidence to support such a usage. On the other hand, there is considerable source evidence indicating that neither Tiberius nor anyone else began to count the years of his rule before the death of Augustus.

Accession of Tiberius.—Augustus died at Nola, in Campania, Italy, on August 19, in the consulship of Sextus Pompeius and Sextus Apuleius, in the 44th year from the Battle of Actium (Dio Cassius lvi. 29. 2; 30. 5). The year is indisputably A.D. 14. Tiberius, away on a journey, was hastily summoned to his father’s deathbed. Tiberius announced the emperor’s death, and, having been for a year or more the commander of the armies, and joint ruler in the provinces, seems to have been accepted without question by the provincials. But in Italy he carried on the government only provisionally, since Rome

was not legally a hereditary monarchy—not a monarchy at all in the eyes of the Romans. It was seemingly with reluctance that Tiberius accepted the titles and powers of the late emperor. (See Velleius Paterculus ii. 123. 1, 2; 124. 2, 3; Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, “Tiberius” iii. 23. 1; 24. 1, 2; Tacitus, *Annals*, i. 5, 7; Dio Cassius lvii. 2. 1–4; 3. 1; 7. 1.)

In the East, where regnal-year reckoning was customary, all documents would have begun to be dated in Tiberius’ reign as soon as news of his accession had arrived. The year number would change at the next New Year’s Day in each local calendar: in Egypt on Thoth 1, August 29 or 30; on the island of Cyprus in September; in Syrian Antioch on Tishri 1, the new moon of October (unless by that time the Semitic month Tishri had already been shifted to coincide with the Julian October, as was certainly the case later). The question is, Was it Tiberius’ year 1 or year 2 that began at the New Year’s Day following his accession?

What Was the “First Year” of Tiberius?—It has been explained that by the postdating, or accession-year, method of numbering regnal years, the remainder of the calendar year in which the reign began was called the accession year, with the year 1 beginning at the next New Year’s Day *after* the accession; but that by the antedating, or non-accession-year, system, the year 1 was that *in which* the new king came to the throne, with the year beginning at the next New Year’s Day called year 2 (see p. 238). This second method, the antedating, or non-accession-year, system is attested by various source documents as the common reckoning used in the Near East in the early period of the Roman Empire.

It would be taken for granted from this evidence that in the East in general the 1st year of Tiberius *ended* and his 2d year began sometime between late August and October, A.D. 14, were it not for direct source evidence that in Egypt, Cyprus, and possibly Syria, Tiberius’ year 1 *began* at the autumn New Year of A.D. 14 (which would make the year 15 of his reign A.D. 28/29). These source data for Tiberius appear to be exceptional, with the numbering running a year later than usual because the accession took place so late (August 19) as to be unknown until after the New Year in distant areas. In view of the differing calendars of the various Eastern peoples, Luke’s dating method must be decided on the evidence from his own country, and not from any other.

Jewish Reckoning of Tiberius’ Reign.—But all that has been said still leaves unanswered the key question: Did the Jews reckon Tiberius’ “year 1” as the short interval beginning at some time after August 19 and ending at the next Jewish New Year’s Day (October, A.D. 14), or did they reckon his first year as *beginning* at the New Year’s Day of A.D. 14? Unfortunately, there are no known inscriptions or coins from Palestine that prove one or the other. However, there is evidence for 1st-century Jewish dating practice from Jewish literature. Josephus indicates unmistakably that the reigns of Herod the Great and his sons were reckoned by the antedating, or non-accession-year, method (see p. 239, note 2; The Reigns of the Herods).

Further, since the rabbinical tradition concerning the reckoning of the years of *Jewish* kings (see note 2) is demonstrated by Josephus as valid for the 1st century, we may reasonably regard the other portion of the same tradition as valid also; namely, the Jewish reckoning of *foreign* kings from Tishri 1. In that case Luke would be expected to count the years of Tiberius, a Roman ruler, from Tishri 1, with his 2d year beginning at the first New Year’s Day of his reign, namely, Tishri 1 in A.D. 14. Since the mid-October date of Tishri 1 allows ample time for the news of Augustus’ death on August 19 to reach

Palestine before Tishri 1, it can hardly be supposed that the Jews, like the Egyptians, began to reckon Tiberius' year 1 only *after* their New Year's Day in A.D. 14.

If, then, Luke employed the normal Jewish method of dating, as seems most probable, we should expect him to designate as the 15th year of Tiberius the Jewish civil year running from autumn to autumn, A.D. 27/28. This is not proved from direct contemporary evidence, but from known Jewish usage it seems to be the most probable solution.

Date of Jesus' Baptism.—If Luke 3:1 refers to A.D. 27/28 as the year in which John the Baptist came out of the wilderness and in which he baptized Jesus, this agrees perfectly with the interpretation of the chronology of Christ's ministry that puts His baptism at some time soon after Tishri 1, in the autumn of A.D. 27 or 483 years after "the going forth of the commandment" in the autumn of 457 B.C. (see Sec. V).

V. Length of Christ's Ministry and the 70th Week

Three and a Half Years of Christ's Ministry.—Since the writers of the four Gospels were not concerned with uniformity or with strict chronological order, there have always been differences of interpretation in reconstructing the sequence and duration of the events of Christ's ministry. No one of the various harmonies of the Gospels can claim complete proof for its chronology. Some assign one year, others two and over, others three and a half, some even seven years to the period. This commentary presents a tentative chronological outline of the Bible narratives built on John's three Passovers (John 2:13; 6:4; 12:1) and one other feast unnamed (John 5:1) but interpreted to be likewise a Passover, and thus it assigns 3 1/2 years to the ministry of Christ (see pp. 193; The Duration of Christ's Ministry), beginning it in the autumn of A.D. 27 and ending it in the spring of A.D. 31.

Daniel's Seventy Weeks.—The lack of conclusive proof for the exact date of the beginning of the ministry of Christ has not only led to differences of opinion as to the events involved, but also caused critics to assert contradictions between the Synoptic Gospels and John, and to attack the historical application of the prophecy of the 70 weeks (Dan. 9:24–27) to the life of Christ. The great prophetic period that was to "seal up the vision and prophecy" by pointing out the time of "Messiah the Prince" has, through the centuries, been interpreted by most theological writers as pointing to Christ's first advent, with the crucifixion occurring either in the midst or at the end of the 70th week. The standard historicist interpretation since the Reformation has been that the 70th weeks follows immediately the 69th week, with no time gap, and that the events prophesied to take place in the 70th week find their fulfillment in connection with the life of Christ. This commentary sets forth what was the majority interpretation during the 19th-century advent movement, namely, that the 70 weeks begin with the 7th year of Artaxerxes (see on Dan. 9:25). This article shows that, by placing the baptism of Christ at the beginning of the 70th week, and His crucifixion in the "midst of the week," the available evidence for the dating of the ministry of Christ can be harmonized with that interpretation.

There is no difficulty in locating "the going forth of the commandment" at the *beginning* of the 70 weeks in the autumn of 457 B.C. That has been covered in preceding volumes (see on Dan. 9:25; for the establishment of the date, see Vol. III, pp. 100, 103, 104). The reader who finds a possible harmony between the events prophetically foretold for the end of that period and the historical data for the life of Christ, can let the weight of prophetic fulfillment decide his preference in the case of dates that are open to varying

interpretations such as A.D. 27, 28, or 29 for the beginning of Christ's ministry, and 30, 31, or 33 for His crucifixion.

To summarize: At present there is no *conclusive* historical and chronological proof, neither is there disproof, that Jesus began His ministry in the autumn of A.D. 27, at the end of 69 weeks of years after 457 B.C.; and that He ended the symbolism of the sacrifices and offerings at the cross 3 1/2 years later, in the spring of A.D. 31, with the latter half of the 70th week extending 3 1/2 years longer, to the end of 490 years from the starting point. But though one cannot hold these dates as definitely proved by direct historical source evidences, one *can* hold them as wholly reasonable deductions from the prophecy—as conclusions not incompatible with any known fact and in harmony with many facts that are known from recent research.

VI. Death and Resurrection of Christ.

Three questions present themselves in connection with the death of Christ: (1) On what day of the week did He die? (2) What was the connection between that day and the Feast of the Passover? (3) What was the year? This section deals with No. 1. No. 2 is examined in Additional Notes on Matt. 26, Note 1. No. 3 is examined in Section VII.

Time Between Crucifixion and Resurrection.—Through the centuries Christendom has been quite agreed that Jesus died on the cross Friday afternoon and rose from the tomb early the next Sunday morning. However, in recent years some have contended that when Christ said He would be “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40), He meant He would be in the grave 72 hours. On this assumption is built the Wednesday crucifixion theory, which places the resurrection on Sabbath afternoon. (A more recent, less exact, Thursday proposal merely computes: “Thursday plus 3 days equals Sunday.”) Hence we should examine Christ's statements regarding the matter.

When Jesus spoke beforehand of His death and resurrection, He used several phrases concerning “three days,” and once “three days and three nights.” Of course, by modern Western reckoning, if we speak of three days after an event we mean three full days or more. Now three full 24-hour days after Friday afternoon would, strictly speaking, extend to Monday afternoon. But our problem is not what those phrases may mean to Westerners, but what Jesus meant by them and what His Near Eastern hearers understood by them.

Meaning of “Day.”—There were various forms of speech used in Christ's day that do not have the same meaning for us. Some examples of these have already been explained (“600 years old,” “son,” or “brother”; see Vol. I, pp. 181, 182; Vol. II, pp. 136, 137; see on 1 Chron. 2:7).

What did Jesus mean by a “day”? He once spoke of the day having 12 hours (John 11:9, 10), referring obviously to the daytime as opposed to the night. This was literally true as Jesus meant it, for when He lived among men the time between sunrise and sunset was divided into 12 equal parts, or “hours,” which “hours” varied in length according to the season. The fact that today we use clock hours of uniform length, in which sunrise and sunset are more or less than 12 sixty-minute hours apart most of the time, does not make Jesus' statement incorrect. Similarly His phrase “three days” must be interpreted according to *what those words meant then to those people*, not what they mean to us today.

Although “day” was, and is, sometimes used to mean the daylight hours, nevertheless the word, when used in counting a series of days, means in both ancient and modern

usage a period including a day and a night. The Greek language, in which the New Testament was written, had a word for “night-day,” *nuchthēmeron* (see 2 Cor. 11:25); and Genesis enumerated each successive day of creation as composed of “evening” and “morning.” Jesus’ “three days and three nights” are merely “three [calendar] days,” as then understood.

Different Phrases for Same Period.—This is clear from the fact that He refers at different times to the same period—the interval between His death and His resurrection—as “in three days,” “after three days,” on “the third day.” Once, because He is quoting from Jonah (ch. 1:17), He uses the phrase “three days and three nights.” Unless we accuse Jesus of contradicting Himself, we must accept all these phrases as meaning the same period of time. Even the priests and Pharisees who quoted Jesus as predicting His resurrection “after three days,” asked Pilate to have the tomb guarded “until the third day” (not “until *after* the third day”). Obviously, “after three days” meant “the third day”:

The following texts mention this three-day period:

“In three days”	“After three days”	“The third day”
Matt. 26:61; 27:40	27:63; 12:40 (and 3 nights)	16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:64
Mark 14:58 (within)	8:31	9:31; 10:34
Luke		9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 21, 46
John 2:19-21		

What, then, did these various three-day expressions mean? We can find out easily by comparing other passages in the Bible that refer to time periods in similar ways.

Three Days, Inclusive.—The question of how long Jesus was in the tomb rose from a modern misunderstanding of inclusive reckoning, the common ancient method of counting. It included both the day (or year) on which any period of time began and also that on which it ended, no matter how small a fraction of the beginning or ending day (or year) was involved. One example of this method is a period (when Shalmaneser besieged Samaria) beginning in the 4th year of Hezekiah and the 7th year of Hoshea, and ending in the 6th year of Hezekiah and the 9th of Hoshea, “at the end of three years” (2 Kings 18:9, 10; see Vol. II, p. 136). It was evidently counted thus: 4, 5, 6 (of Hezekiah’s reign), three years, *inclusive*.

Take another example. We say that a child is not one year old until after he has lived 12 full months from the date of his birth. He becomes one year old as he enters his second year of life, and becomes 2 years old after he completes his second year. Thus a child is called “10 years old” all through his 11th year, and becomes 11 only after he has reached the end of 11 full years. Not so in the Bible. Noah was, literally, “a son of 600 years” “*in* the six hundredth year” of his life (Gen. 7:6, 11); although his 600 years were not reckoned inclusively (see Vol. I, p. 181 and note), these verses show that in his 600th year his age was considered 600, not 599. A Hebrew baby was circumcised when he was “eight days old” (Gen. 17:12), “the eighth day” (Lev. 12:3; Luke 1:59), or “when eight days were accomplished” (Luke 2:21). The Bible lists several periods of “three days” that ended during, not after, the third day, and thus covered less than three full 24-hour days (see Gen. 42:17–19; cf. 1 Kings 12:5, 12 with 2 Chron. 10:5, 12).

Not only among the Hebrews, but also among other ancient peoples, we have examples of inclusive reckoning. This was common in Egypt, Greece, and Rome (see Vol. II, p. 136). It is still found in the Far East today. Even in some countries of Europe a week's interval is referred to as "eight days," and a three-day round trip ticket bought on Sunday, for instance, is expected to be used on Tuesday. In modern Japan, until MacArthur's government changed the system for the convenience of the compilers of vital statistics, a child born in December was a year old for the remainder of the month and became two years old on January 1; "two years old" meant having lived in two calendar years, regardless of how small a fraction of either year was involved. Similarly, in Chinese reckoning a child born late last year is two years old this year (the second calendar year of his life) and will be three years old as soon as next year begins. Obviously, this is not a literal reckoning but is based on a concept of time that comes down from a long cultural usage. Similarly, we must bear in mind the cultural concepts of time that were held in Jesus' time.

Since the common custom of inclusive reckoning is well attested for the Hebrews, for other ancient nations, and in the East down to modern times, it seems wholly unreasonable to understand Jesus' words about a three-day period in terms of our modern Western mathematical method of reckoning. By common usage His hearers would count the three days successively as:

1. The day of the crucifixion.
2. The day after that event.
3. The "third" day after (by modern count, the second day after).

We cannot insist that when Jesus once said that He would rise *after* three days (Mark 8:31) He meant after the end of the third full day, or 72 hours. For that He would have said "on the fourth day." (For the phrase "four days ago" meaning three full days, or at least 72 hours, see on Acts 10:30.)

But we are not left with merely an obvious deduction as to what Jesus meant by "third day." We have it from His own lips. In speaking of Herod on one occasion He said, "Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:32, 33). Thus He equated the third day with the day after tomorrow—the third day counted inclusively.

Crucifixion on Friday.—What day, we may inquire, was the day on which this three-day prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled? The answer is, "The first day of the week" (Mark 16:9; see on Matt. 28:1). Late "that same day" (Luke 24:1, 13), two disciples met Him on the road to Emmaus, and in talking of the crucifixion of their Master and their own deep disappointment, declared, "To day is the third day since these things were done" (Luke 24:21). Jesus Himself said, when He appeared to the Twelve in the upper room, "Thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day" (Luke 24:46). As Paul later said, "He rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:4). Sunday, obviously, was the third day.

What, then, was the day of the crucifixion, seeing that Sunday was the third day, or the "day after tomorrow"? Obviously, the preceding Friday, the day before the Sabbath. This is in exact accord with Luke's statement that the women left the embalming unfinished on the day of preparation as the Sabbath drew on, and rested the Sabbath day

according to the commandment before returning on the first day of the week (Luke 23:54 to Luke 24:1). They would not have waited several days, as is supposed by those who put Jesus' death on Wednesday and make the Sabbath here mentioned merely a festival, or ceremonial, sabbath. Besides, the phrase "an high day" is taken by many to indicate that in that year the festival sabbath fell on the weekly Sabbath (see on John 19:31).

VII. Year of the Crucifixion

Section VI of this article has shown that Jesus died on Friday and rose on the following Sunday. In Additional Notes on Matt. 26, Note 1, reasons are set forth for holding that He died on the day that was called the 14th of Nisan by the Jewish leaders who accused Jesus to Pilate. The topic still to be discussed is the year of the crucifixion, to which the New Testament gives no clue except what can be derived from the statement about the 15th year of Tiberius and from the length of Jesus' ministry. Contemporary non-Biblical history furnishes no independent evidence. The nearest approach to a date is the bare statement of Tacitus that Christus, founder of the hated Christians, was put to death in the reign of Tiberius by Pontius Pilate (*Annals* xv. 44). The early church generally agreed that Jesus was crucified on Nisan 14 (a few said the 15th), but soon lost track of computing that Jewish-calendar date. There was, from the earliest writings, a wide disagreement on the year. According to one tradition the date was March 25 in the consulship of the Gemini (A.D. 29); another identified the darkness of the cross with a solar eclipse mentioned by a pagan annalist, Phlegon, as occurring in Ol. 202.4 (the 4th year of the 202d Olympiad, A.D. 32/33); there was also a tradition in some quarters that A.D. 31 was the year of the crucifixion (see Ogg in the bibliography, p. 265).

The A.D. 29 date, generally connected with the theory of a one-year ministry, offers no possibility of a Friday Nisan 14; the 14th would fall on Saturday, Sunday, or beyond. A solar eclipse always occurring at new moon could not have occurred at a Passover (which was a full-moon feast), nor can an eclipse last so long. The modern tendency has been to attempt to settle the crucifixion date by computing the lunar date backward from modern astronomical tables for the most likely year between 30 and 33 that would allow a Friday 14th of Nisan. The date is limited to a time within Pilate's term of office (A.D. 26–36) and somewhat after Tiberius' 15th year, and to a Jewish year in which the day for slaying the Passover lamb fell on a Friday. Consequently the problem has come to be regarded as a search for a Friday 14th of the Jewish month Nisan, the lunar month beginning with the crescent moon (see Vol. II, pp. 114-116) of either March or April. Since astronomical evidence has been claimed for different dates, its validity must be discussed here, though the variation in methods and results indicates that extreme caution is to be observed in basing a conclusion on astronomical and calendrical calculation alone. Such computation can fix dates based on specific eclipse records or other exact data: but new-moon computation can merely exclude a date completely if it places a month in an obviously impossible relationship to the moon's phases. A lunar date computed as possible is not thereby proved to be the actual date; there are too many uncertainties (see Appendix to this article, pp. 255-265).

Possible Years for a Friday Crucifixion.—By modern methods of calculating the astronomical new moon and estimating the interval between that and the first day of the lunar month, it may be concluded that a Friday 14th could have occurred in three possible lunar months between A.D. 28 and 33:

a. The month beginning one day and about 22 hours after the new moon of March, A.D. 30 (approximately March 25), if reckoned from the visibility of the crescent (the 14th being Friday, April 7).

b. The month beginning three days and about four hours after the new moon of April, A.D. 31 (approximately April 14), if reckoned by a somewhat longer but possible interval after the astronomical new moon (the 14th being Friday, April 27).

c. The month beginning one day and about five hours after the new moon of March, A.D. 33 (approximately March 21, with the 14th on April 3), if this unusually early date could introduce Nisan, rather than Adar II.

No other years in this period offer a possible Friday Passover day.

A.D. 33 an Untenable Date.—In the past the long-accepted date of the crucifixion was A.D. 33 (set forth as early as the 13th century by Roger Bacon). This has appeared in the Ussher-Lloyd marginal dates in many KJV Bibles. However, this date is seldom advocated today. It was originally based on the assumption that the Jewish calendar of the 1st century A.D. was computed exactly the same as the revised form of that calendar that was introduced several centuries after Christ and has come down through the Middle Ages to modern times. This later Jewish calendar allows the Passover to come much earlier (at times as early as March 15). The possible Friday 14th in A.D. 33 would require Nisan to begin March 21, four days ahead of the earliest Nisan 1 of the Babylonian cycle in that period (see p. 236), and earlier than Elephantine papyri (5th century B.C.) would indicate for older Jewish practice. Hence the month beginning on March 21, A.D. 33, would be expected to be an Adar II.

If that month was Nisan, one of two alternatives is true: either the whole Jewish cycle was then running earlier than the Babylonian, or that was an exceptionally early Nisan, out of line with the usual cycle. Such an unusual cycle would begin Nisan in March most of the time, and in some years not merely four days ahead of the expected limit, but much earlier than that; therefore such a cycle would be out of harmony with the offering of the wave sheaf (see p. 236), which was part of the Nisan festivals as long as the Temple stood. If the Nisan of A.D. 33 was an irregular month, earlier than normal for the fixed cycle, then in the absence of positive documentary evidence this date for the crucifixion becomes a mere conjecture. Since there is no evidence to support either premise, A.D. 33 should not be considered unless it offers the only possible Friday 14th in the whole period, and such is not the case. The lunar month beginning in March, A.D. 33, should, from all the evidence, be an Adar II. In that case Nisan came a month later, in which the 14th was not on Friday. Thus the evidence is so strong against A.D. 33 as to rule it out of serious consideration. This reduces the choice to A.D. 30 or 31.

Choice Between 30 and 31.—The most popular choice, in this century, has been A.D. 30. Though some who reckon two or even three years as the duration of Christ's ministry have held this date, a 3 1/2-year duration cannot be reckoned as ending in A.D. 30 without supposing a coregency reckoning for the 15th year of Tiberius. Therefore the more recent exponents of this date have tended to advocate a duration of one year or little more. The basis has generally been the lunar computation of Friday, April 7, as the 14th of Nisan. Further, the fact that this date harmonizes with the Babylonian 19-year cycle (as developed in the 4th century B.C.), whereas 33 does not, has been taken in some quarters as decisive evidence in favor of 30.

A modern New Testament scholar points out this uncertainty, citing the most confident modern exponent of that date: “A. T. Olmstead identified the day of Jesus’ crucifixion as Friday, April 7, A.D. 30—probably correctly *if the Jerusalem Jews followed the Babylonian calendar in reckoning Passover*” (Sherman E. Johnson, exegetical comment on Matt. 26:17 in *The Interpreter’s Bible*; italics supplied). However, the year 30 rests on two assumptions: (1) that Nisan in that year was the lunar month beginning in March, not in April; and (2) that the month began with the observation of the crescent on the evening of March 24. Neither of these assumptions can be proved.

Not all scholars accept the two basic assumptions on which the date A.D. 30 depends. Some of them, employing different but equally valid premises and marshaling evidence that seems to them equally, if not more, reasonable, reach the conclusion that A.D. 31, rather than A.D. 30, is the more probable year. In the absence of actual documentary evidence as to the Jewish method of computing the calendar in the early 1st century, it seems unsafe to assume that the Jewish Nisan in A.D. 30 was necessarily the lunar month beginning in March. It is pointed out (see Appendix, p. 258) that in A.D. 30 the Jewish calendar in all probability did not follow the Babylonian cycle, which would begin Nisan with the March moon, but that there is equal if not greater probability that the Jews began that Nisan in April. This April Nisan would not have had a Friday Passover. It is further pointed out that A.D. 31 is astronomically possible if Nisan in that year began after more than the minimum interval from the astronomical new moon—a day or two later than some have calculated. Likewise it is noted that an intentional delay of one day for partisan reasons may be implied in the difference between the Thursday night observance of the Passover supper by Christ and His disciples and the Friday evening observance by the Jewish leaders who took Jesus before Pilate—a difference ascribed by critics to a discrepancy between the accounts of the Synoptic Gospels and John (see Additional Notes on Matt. 26, Note 1; for a discussion of the astronomical and calendrical arguments for 30 and 31 see Appendix, pp. 255-258).

Those who present evidence that may point to A.D. 31 frankly admit that, in the present state of knowledge, the case for that year cannot be established by astronomical and calendrical proof. But they consider it proper to call attention to facts that indicate an equal lack of certainty for A.D. 30, and the advisability of refraining from any dogmatic assertion in behalf of either year. The conclusion may be reached that 31, or some other year, can be considered astronomically possible or probable *if* certain conditions are assumed. But in the absence of source data establishing the now unknown conditions, calendar computation must be subordinated to other factors in making a decision as to the more probable year. The advocates of 31 have generally reckoned a 3 1/2-year ministry from late A.D. 27, and have taken also into account the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy of “the midst of the week” (Dan. 9:27).

Conclusion Impossible From Calendar Data Alone.—The fact remains that at the present time we cannot be sure of the lunar-calendar system of the Jews in the 1st century. Therefore we cannot say with certainty, “This, according to lunar astronomy, was the year of the crucifixion.” With our knowledge of general principles derived from Babylonian records, from earlier Jewish papyri, and from later Jewish tradition, we can say that only three times during the period allowable for the crucifixion can a possible Friday 14th of Nisan be computed from lunar data. Since one of these, A.D. 33, seems untenable, the alternatives are A.D. 30 or 31. We may add, in favor of 31, the

consideration of the “midst” of the 70th week (see p. 247), 3 1/2 years after the baptism of Jesus. *But so far as the lunar-calendar evidence goes*, the field remains open for those who by one system arrive at A.D. 31 (in the mathematically exact “midst” of the “week”), and those who by another method arrive at A.D. 30 (which some accept as the approximate midst of the week). Other considerations than lunar calculation must decide the choice.

Date Adopted in This Commentary.—The whole question of the Passover date in connection with the death of Christ is so complex that, as has been stated, no one view has ever been set forth with complete proof from unequivocal astronomical or calendrical data. However, one has a right to seek, from the evidence offered, what seems the most reasonable basis for a choice. This article has presented Biblical and non-Biblical evidences that may be taken as pointing to A.D. 31, but the uncertainty of the lunar evidence necessitates reliance on the interpretation of the Biblical text and the historical factors. This commentary has set forth the date A.D. 31 in terms of the evidence for Christ’s ministry as a whole. It has been shown that the earliest possible date of Jesus’ baptism at the age of about 30, in the 15th year of Tiberius, is the autumn of A.D. 27 (see p. 247). Since this commentary employs a harmony of the Gospels that gives Jesus a ministry of 3 1/2 years, following His baptism, it naturally selects the year 31 for the crucifixion, which is 3 1/2 years after the autumn of A.D. 27. That is the earliest date compatible with both the 15th year and the duration of Christ’s ministry, and it is the latest year compatible with both the midst of the 70th week and the lunar factors. In the face of the absence of adequate proof for either 30 or 31, no one can find fault with the selection of 31, even though it does not at present command majority acceptance.

VII. Conclusion

This much can be concluded from the data presented in this article—the evidence nowhere contradicts the Gospel narratives. Further, the evidence can be harmonized with the Gospels within reasonable possibility. The lack of sufficient exact data does not in any way throw doubt on the Gospels, which contain so many evidences of historical accuracy as to give us confidence in their trustworthiness. The date for the birth of Christ is known to be as early as somewhere near the beginning of 4 B.C., perhaps a few months earlier. His baptism was, according to the most likely method of reckoning, in 27/28; the crucifixion, while undetermined astronomically as between A.D. 30 and 31, is, by the most exact interpretation of the 70th week (see p. 248), placed in A.D. 31.

appendix

Many have thought that the date of the crucifixion can be determined very easily by computing the date of a new moon or a full moon by means of astronomical tables. This appendix is inserted to show the complexity and uncertainty of such computation. This calls for a discussion of two points:

1. The methods and factors involved in the attempts made to prove the possibility or probability of a Friday Nisan 14 in either A.D. 30 or A.D. 31.
2. The limitations of these methods, that is, the impossibility of depending on modern lunar computation to establish any precise date in the time of Christ in the absence of source documents throwing light on the Jewish calendar at that time.

The application of lunar data to the problem of finding any Passover date in New Testament times involves two variable factors. The choice must be made between the March new moon and the April new moon in any given year as the basis for identifying

the month of Nisan. Then the astronomical new moon (conjunction) must be calculated backward from modern lunar tables with a small but sometimes significant margin of error. Finally the interval between that point and the visible crescent must be calculated, according to astronomical or calendrical theory, in order to arrive at the most probable sunset for the beginning of the first day of the month. It must be remembered that our lack of exact knowledge of the actual practices of those times may lead us to choose the wrong month or the wrong day; consequently no result is more than a probability. This element of uncertainty is made clear in the letters from astronomers reproduced at the end of this appendix.

Calendrical Arguments on A.D. 30 and 31

The Basis for the Dates A.D. 30 and 31.—Obviously in A.D. 31 the lunar month beginning in April must have been Nisan, for the March new moon would have been too early that year to allow the mid-Nisan Passover season, with the offering of the wave sheaf of new barley, to coincide with the barley harvest. But in A.D. 30 the lunar month beginning presumably on March 25 was possibly late enough for Nisan. On the other hand it was possibly early enough to have been designated Adar II, the 13th month (see p. 236). March 25 may be considered too near the borderline to allow a definite decision on this point without specific evidence.

Those who believe that the Jewish calendar of that time coincided with the Babylonian are sure that A.D. 30 was the year of the crucifixion because of their certainty that in that year the Babylonian *Nisanu*, the 1st month (corresponding to the Jewish Nisan), was the lunar month beginning in March—one of the three possible lunar months in which the 14th could be on Friday (see p. 252). *Nisanu* would not have begun in April that year; A.D. 30/31 was a 13-month year in the Babylonian calendar, according to the fixed cycle that was developed in the 14th century B.C. and still used in astronomical texts through Jesus' day; and a 13-month year always began in March. If the Jews likewise began Nisan with that same March new moon, then Friday, April 7, A.D. 30, could have been the 14th of Nisan, the Passover day. If, on the other hand, the Jews repeated Adar in A.D. 30, then Friday, April 7, would have been the 14th of Adar II, not of Nisan. If so, the Passover day of A.D. 30 would have come a month later, and so not on Friday. In that case A.D. 30 could not have been the year of the crucifixion; this would leave 31 as the best possibility.

Accordingly, the alternative conditions for determining the year of the death of Jesus by the lunar calendar may be stated as follows:

If the Jews had an Adar II in A.D. 30, the crucifixion could not have occurred in that year.

If the Jews had an Adar II in A.D. 31, then the crucifixion might have occurred in either 30 or 31, according to one of two differing interpretations of the reckoning of the month from the new moon.

The date generally accepted in the scholarly world today is A.D. 30. It appears in most reference books and in the new study helps in recent Oxford Bibles. This date is based on the assumption that the Jewish calendar of Christ's time, like the Babylonian calendar, was based on the observation of the crescent moon each month, and that both calendars inserted the 13th months in the same years, according to the Babylonian 19-year cycle as fixed in the 4th century B.C. How valid is that assumption?

The following paragraphs will discuss the astronomical and calendrical evidence for A.D. 30, which is built on one set of assumptions, and for the alternative date of 31, which is based on other assumptions; and they will indicate the inadequacy of technical proofs for either. The last two paragraphs of Sec. VII give reasons for the adoption of the date A.D. 31 in this commentary.

The Case for A.D. 30.—The twin foundations on which is built the current theory that A.D. 30 was the crucifixion year (see p. 253) are: (1) The assumption that we can be certain that Nisan began in March, not April, in A.D. 30, because the 1st-century Jews used the same fixed 19-year cycle the Babylonians had developed in the 4th century B.C.; and (2) the assumption that we can know that Nisan 1 was March 24, because ancient Jewish lunar dates can be computed to the day from modern lunar tables and from a theoretical calculation of the interval between conjunction and visibility. But neither assumption can be proved. In the most modern tables of the Babylonian calendar (see Parker and Dubberstein in the bibliography, p. 266), the element of uncertainty involved in attempts to fix a Babylonian or Jewish date to the exact day is made clear in the authors' statement of their method of reckoning.

These tables trace the gradual development of the Babylonian calendar. On ancient clay-tablet documents from Babylonia, date lines mentioning *Addaru II* or *Ululu II* in specific regnal years indicate the location of many Babylonian 13-month years. The sequence of such years appears to have become fixed about 367 B.C. in a regular 19-year cycle, with an *Addaru II* added in the 3d, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, and 19th year of each cycle, and an *Ululu II* in the 17th. From such data Parker and Dubberstein have continued this cycle on through A.D. 75, and have tabulated the Julian dates (see p. 236) of the first of each Babylonian month, thus reconstructing a relatively complete approximation of the Babylonian calendar for several centuries. We must allow a possible error of a day in some of the months, also that of a month occasionally when, in the absence of a source document dated in a 13th month, the extra month may have been tabulated in the wrong year. In applying these Babylonian lunar-calendar tables to Biblical dates, the authors allow the possibility of a still higher proportion of the months being a day off because of the difference in longitude between Babylon and Jerusalem; and of course a discrepancy of a month would occur whenever the Jews inserted the extra month at a different time from the Babylonian calendar.

The Parker-Dubberstein tables are a valuable tool for approximating with reasonable accuracy the actual ancient *Babylonian* calendar, especially for the period following the fixing of the cycle of months in the 4th century B.C. For historical purposes a one-day margin of error is microscopically small, and even that of a month is most often negligible. Biblical scholars may be justified in applying these tables, with proper caution, to the approximation of Jewish dates as well. But it is another matter entirely to base a precise date, a specific day of the week, on a modern reconstruction that is admittedly only a variable approximation to the Jewish calendar. Such a date as Friday, April 7, A.D. 30, for the day of the crucifixion should, at most, be offered only as a high probability, not as an established fact.

Schram's astronomical tables locate the March conjunction on March 22 in A.D. 30. Conjunction (the astronomical "new moon") occurs when the moon passes directly between the earth and the sun, with its unlighted face turned toward the earth (see Vol. II, p. 115). It is an invisible phenomenon, but its specific point of time can be computed,

even for the 1st century, within a margin of two or three hours. However, the actual day designated as Nisan 1 in the Babylonian calendar was determined by variable factors—by the size and brightness of the first crescent, by its distance above the local horizon, and by atmospheric conditions (see Vol. II, pp. 115, 116). The date of March 25 for Nisan 1 in A.D. 30 on the reconstructed Babylonian table is a modern estimate, subject to differences of opinion, and impossible to verify.

Was the crescent visible after sunset of March 24? Or was the sky obscured, and the moon not seen until the next night, with the result that the month was delayed one day if it followed a 29-day month? Even if the Babylonian *Nisanu* 1 was March 25, with the 14th of the month consequently on Friday, April 7, does that prove conclusively that the 14th of that lunar month also fell on Friday, April 7, in the *Jewish* calendar? What if for any reason the moon was not visible in Jerusalem on the same day as in Babylon; or if possibly the Jewish calendar officials used any system of reckoning the month that was different from the Babylonian method? Further, even if both calendars began a month on March 25, it is not necessarily certain that the Jews called that month Nisan. If they had a differing cycle, or if in that spring the barley harvest was considered too late, that borderline date of March 25 could easily have been the first of Adar II, and in that case Nisan 14, a month later, was not on Friday.

Technical Evidence Inadequate for Proof.—The current acceptance of A.D. 30 as the established date of the crucifixion is based by some on the premise that the Jews after the Captivity adopted the Babylonian calendar entire and in detail. At least it is based on certain assumptions, none of which can be proved, and against several of which there is at least some evidence: (1) that both Jews and Babylonians reckoned the first of the month solely from the appearance of the crescent moon; (2) that March 25, A.D. 30, a date estimated from variable factors by modern calculation, was the actual Nisan 1 in both Babylonia and Jerusalem; (3) that neither cloudy weather nor any element of calculation delayed the Jewish Nisan and the preceding month by so much as one day; (4) that the Jews, though bound to local observation for the first of each month, followed a fixed Babylonian cycle for the insertion of their 13th months, regardless of the Palestinian barley harvest or any other local factors.

The Alternative of A.D. 31.—There is more than one method of arriving at A.D. 31, but little has been published in the way of technical treatment. One exposition of the view is the hypothesis that the Jews in Christ's day were using at least a partly calculated rather than a purely observed month, and that they probably put Nisan 14 (when the Passover lamb was slain) after the full moon by intentionally allowing, at times, a day longer between conjunction and the first of Nisan. Others propose that the same date would result from a possible adjustment, suggested in one explanation of the Johannine-Synoptic question of the Passover supper: The Friday 14th of Nisan in the year of the crucifixion may have been the result of an intentional delaying of Nisan 1 later than the moon would seem to have required, by the priests who were in charge of the calendar. Such a delay might conceivably have been planned in order to make the offering of the wave sheaf on the 16th of Nisan fall on the day following the Decalogue Sabbath. Among the Sadducees, of whom the leading priests were the chief representatives, some believed that "the morrow after the sabbath" (Lev. 23:15, 16) meant the morrow after the *weekly* Sabbath, not the festival sabbath. In that case Thursday could have been the 14th day according to the moon, but Friday the 14th according to the official calendar, or at least

according to the priestly officials who took Jesus to Pilate but would not enter his palace because they were observing the Passover on Friday evening. There is no record in Jewish literature of such a difference in observance, though there is reference to attempts to manipulate the calendar by such parties (see Talmud *Ross Hashanah* 22b and Note 7 in Soncino ed., p. 95). Certain Sadducees and Pharisees engaged in bitter controversy over whether the day of the wave sheaf should follow the first Passover sabbath or the weekly Sabbath, and that two schools of thought among the Pharisees contended over whether the law of the Sabbath took precedence over the law of the festival.

Mention has been made of the uncertainty as to whether the Jewish calendar had 13 months in A.D. 30/31, which was a 17th year in the standard Babylonian cycle. On this point the only documentary evidence comes from three 17th-year papyri of an earlier period. These papyri from Elephantine (see Vol. III, pp. 79-83, 103-107) show that Jewish practice was certainly not consistent—that an Adar II was just as possible in the 16th year as in the 17th. It is also pointed out that if the Jews had a fixed cycle by the time of Christ, it was not unlikely that their counterpart of the Babylonian *Ululu II* in the 17th year was an Adar II at the end of the preceding year. It has been explained that if the Jewish year A.D. 30/31 was a common year of 12 months, then Nisan in A.D. 30 is completely eliminated (see p. 255) as a possible date for the crucifixion. However, A.D. 31 is possible, regardless of whether Adar II came in 30 or 31, if Nisan 1 in 31 began after a long interval from conjunction, or if it was delayed by design.

Computation in the Jewish Calendar.—Since so much depends on the question of the element of calculation in the Jewish month, and on a possible fixed cycle of years, it may be well to examine the evidence on these two factors. The Jewish calendar reckoning was, according to the Talmud, always at least professedly empirical, that is, based on observation of the crescent and of the seasons, fixed by a committee of the Sanhedrin. Yet the Talmud contains indications that there was some leeway for the calendar officials to use their discretion. Remembering always that the Talmud is several centuries later than the time of Christ—though it is thought to reflect usage of earlier times—and that it is sometimes contradictory, we may review, for what it is worth, some of the evidence on the calendar that it contains.

The Talmud mentions three conditions, any two of which would indicate the need for inserting a 13th month to delay Nisan until the next moon: (1) if the equinox was late in relation to the end of Adar, that is, if the 12th month ended too early in March; (2) if the barley crop would not be ripe in time for the wave sheaf ceremony; (3) if the immaturity of the fruit trees showed that it was still too early; another condition mentioned was if the spring lambs, necessary for the Passover, were still too young. Even if the intercalation of the extra month was determined by seasonal conditions alone, two of those conditions were necessary to determine the need for the delay. This left room for decision by the authorities (see Talmud *Sanhedrin* 11b, Soncino ed., p. 49). As for the barley harvest, the three principal areas of Palestine differed in the time of ripening; in deciding the necessity of inserting the second Adar, the crop must be judged too immature in two out of the three areas. The rule that the extra month must not be announced before Tishri 1 (six months ahead of time) proves that the experts had ways of computing it in advance by theoretical methods. On the rules in the Talmud for inserting the extra month, see *Sanhedrin* 11a–13b, Soncino ed., pp. 44, 49–61. Rabbi Akiba (c. A.D. 50–132), when he

was imprisoned, is said to have calculated three successive 13-month years in advance. He could hardly have done this without knowledge of some kind of cycle.

To summarize: The whole picture gives the impression that those responsible for the adjustment of the calendar had considerable theoretical computation back of their apparently empirical methods—observation of the moon and the seasons—and that the old empirical methods, though unnecessary, were perpetuated ceremonially (see appendix to the tractate *Rosh Hashanah*, Soncino ed., p. 178). It would seem that the officials, while scrupulously receiving witnesses each new moon (see Vol. II, pp. 113, 122), could have made use of certain regulations to delay the month at times; and in the multiple conditions for determining the 13th month they must have had considerable opportunity for using their own judgment (see Talmud *Rosh Hashanah* 22a–25b, and appendix, Soncino ed., pp. 91–115, 181). The Talmud indicates that they made calendar calculations of some sort known only to the select few. They could calculate the equinox approximately, and could hardly have been completely ignorant of the lunar-calendar theory that was already long known to the Babylonians and the Greeks, such as the 19-year cycle. When the rules for the Jewish calendar were finally published in a systematic form, so as to free the distant Jews from dependence on Jerusalem, these rules were not claimed to be a new invention, but the promulgation of methods long preserved in priestly circles. It is entirely possible, though not provable, that as early as the 1st century the priests may have regulated the month of Nisan in order to locate the day of the Passover in relation to the full moon or to place it on a certain day of the week (cf. Talmud *Rosh Hashanah* 20a, 22b, Soncino ed., pp. 91–115), or that they determined the insertion of the 13th months by a fixed, repeating cycle, while following, in a formal sense, the old empirical practices out of pure conservatism.

The Possibility of a Fixed Cycle.—By the 3d century, at least, the Christians knew of the Jewish 19-year cycle (see an extract from Anatolius in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* vii. 32). If there was such a Jewish cycle in the 1st century, what might have been its scheme? Did its 13th months, recurring in the same years in each successive cycle, agree with the 13th months in the Babylonian cycle that had been standardized in the early 4th century B.C. A rather close alignment of the Babylonian and Jewish months is indicated for the 5th century B.C. by certain of the Elephantine papyri (see tables in Vol. III, pp. 108, 109). This similarity may have resulted from similar empirical methods, but as late as the time of Christ it may also have been the result of the Jews using a similar form of the 19-year cycle, a cycle of which the 1st-century Jewish officials could hardly have been ignorant.

If a regular Jewish cycle, approximating the Babylonian, existed already in the 1st century, the Jews would be expected to insert a second Adar either six months earlier or six months later than the Babylonian Elul II in the 17th year (see p. 236). Which would it be? It cannot be said with certainty. However, it is interesting to note that if the later numbering of the Jewish cycle years can be extended backward into a 1st-century form of the cycle that approximates the Babylonian series, an Adar II of the Jewish 8th year would fall six months earlier than an Elul II in the Babylonian 17th year; and that in such a case an Adar II would fall in both A.D. 30 and A.D. 33, and would eliminate both these years as possible crucifixion dates, leaving A.D. 31 as the best possibility. But that is at present no more than an interesting conjecture, since we have no direct evidence for

Jewish practice in the 1st century. Their cycle, if any, is not known, and they may have used purely empirical methods that put Adar II in differing years without a system, so that it might have fallen in either 30 or 31, for example. Historical evidence at present provides no basis for being certain of the 13th month in either year.

A Matter of Probability.—So far as actual proof from astronomical and calendrical evidence goes, the question of A.D. 30 versus 31 can be settled only in terms of relative probability. In the 1st century, either the Jews employed a regular 19-year cycle, with a fixed sequence of 13-month years, or they did not. If they had no regular sequence, as many think, a date such as Friday, Nisan 14 in A.D. 30, which depends on the identity of a Jewish 13-month year with a 17th year of the Babylonian cycle (see p. 255 and note), is a mere guess. If they had a fixed sequence, there is no proof that it was identical with the Babylonian cycle, and it could not be the same as the later form of the Jewish cycle, which runs too early for the barley harvest. If their earliest fixed sequence of 13-month years was the same as they had later, when they standardized their calendar, then the Jewish year A.D. 30/31, the year corresponding to the Babylonian 17th, was certainly *not* a 13-month year, with Nisan 14 on Friday. It has been shown that if calculated factors affected Nisan 1 in A.D. 31, there are several possible reasons for considering that year not only possible as the crucifixion year, but the more probable of the two.

Expert Testimony on Lunar Calculation

The reasons for the choice of A.D. 31 as the crucifixion year, for the purposes of this commentary, have been explained (see p. 254). Because of the inherent uncertainties involved in modern attempts to reckon an ancient calendar date when ancient source documents are not available, particular attention has been given to nonastronomical factors. In evaluating the evidence offered from lunar calculation, the editors of this commentary felt the need of expert information on the degree of reliability of such evidence. Accordingly, the editor wrote to several leading astronomers asking their opinion (1) concerning the degree of accuracy possible in reckoning back to the Julian date of any new moon or full moon in Christ's time on the basis of modern lunar tables; and (2) concerning the elements of uncertainty in converting such an ancient date from astronomical terms to a specific day in the Jewish calendar, as would be necessary in order to assign a Julian date to the crucifixion.

In their answers to the first question the four astronomers who replied differ as to the degree of error that must be allowed for in calculating an ancient phase of the moon, this margin of error being attributed chiefly to the variation in the rotation of the earth on its axis. (This rotational variability, which cannot be predicted, is not due to uncertainty in calculating the relative motions of the heavenly bodies; it affects only the time of day at which a new moon, for example, occurred. This error can be eliminated only in instances where ancient source documents, such as eclipse records, give the hour of the occurrence.) Occasionally this small margin of error would result in uncertainty as to whether the moon reached an angle of possible visibility in a given locality before or after moonset. In such cases a few minutes' difference could make the difference of a whole day in the Jewish calendar, since a crescent not quite far enough from the sun to be seen on one evening cannot be seen until the next evening.

In their answers to the second question, however, the astronomers unanimously point to an important and unavoidable uncertainty in every ancient lunar calendar date. Even if a new moon could be reckoned accurately to the fraction of a second, there would still

remain the variable and unverifiable elements affecting the interval between conjunction and the first visibility after sunset (see p. 256). On this question the replies agree in pointing out the uncertainty involved in any method of reckoning from the astronomical data to a specific day of a Jewish month whenever ancient source data are not available. Thus they make clear the impossibility of identifying the Julian equivalent of any Jewish Passover with absolute certainty.

The commentary editor's letter of inquiry and the replies from astronomers are here reproduced in full:

[This letter was addressed to several astronomers.]

“January 15, 1956

“DEAR SIR:

“I am writing as editor of a 7-volume Bible Commentary, of which the Old Testament volumes have already been issued. In dealing with the correlation of Bible chronology with the known facts of ancient history in terms of Julian dating, our editorial staff naturally wish to avoid unwarranted statements. We have proceeded on the basis that certain dates in the Old Testament period can be established with a high degree of certainty by interpreting, through modern astronomical calculations, ancient source documents such as specific eclipse records, Babylonian astronomical tablets, or papyri giving equivalent solar and lunar dates. There seems, however, to be a contrast between the relative certainty of the results obtainable when such sources are available, and the attempts to compute specific New Testament lunar dates, such as a Passover date in the time of Christ, by calculation from modern astronomical tables, in the absence of ancient dated Jewish documents. Our study has led us to doubt the reliability of Jewish lunar dates thus computed. Accordingly, may I ask you two questions?

“1. Parker and Dubberstein's *Babylonian Chronology* (Univ. of Chicago, 1942) based on Schoch's Table M and Sidersky's work, claims only 70 per cent accuracy, to the day, for its Babylonian calendar, and allows an even smaller percentage for corresponding Jewish dates. I have been told that in dating the phases of the moon as far back as the 1st century A.D. a possible error of about two hours must be allowed for. Yet I have also been told that certain tables such as those of Schoch and Neugebauer, designed for computing lunar-calendar dates from lunar tables, have an error measured in minutes. Do these tables, calculated especially for ancient times, go into further refinements of computation that would decrease the usual error, or must their margin of error be added to the two hours?

“2. Apart from the foregoing margin of error, there seem to be so many variable calendrical factors, that I wonder how much validity there is in present-day attempts to date Christ's crucifixion from lunar tables, seeing that these attempts rest on the assumption that such tables as the aforementioned make it possible for us to know exactly in what years the 14th of the Jewish lunar month of Nisan came on Friday. My reason for doubting the validity of these attempts is that the determination of such a date as Nisan 14 seems to be dependent on (1) reckoning backward from modern tables to lunar conjunction, with apparently the possibility of a wider margin of error than I had thought; (2) estimating theoretically the interval between conjunction and the visible crescent for the beginning of the month, with the further uncertainty of Jewish practice and local weather, and (3) identifying that lunar month as Nisan (rather than Adar II) by extending the earlier Babylonian 19-year cycle into the 1st century without dated source documents, and without any assurance that it was in use in that form in Palestine. Therefore I would

ask: What validity, if any, is there in lunar calculation as a method for arriving at Nisan 14 in any year of the 1st century A.D.

"Pardon my encroaching on your valuable time. Your early reply will be greatly appreciated. Unless you state otherwise I shall understand that your answer may be quoted.

"Sincerely,

(Signed) F. D. NICHOL"

"DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
U.S. NAVAL OBSERVATORY
Washington 25, D.C.

"In Reply Refer to
NavObsy/G
H5(14)
Ser 127

January 24, 1956

"Mr. Francis D. Nichol, Editor
Review and Herald
Takoma Park
Washington 12, D.C.

"DEAR MR. NICHOL:

"Your letter of 15 January 1956 has been received. The 70 per cent accuracy which Parker and Dubberstein estimate for their table of chronology refers to the percentage of cases in which a date taken from the table will agree with the astronomically computed date for the beginning of the month. The uncertainty of one day could be avoided by computing the beginning of every month, instead of using Schoch's Table M, but the labor that this would require would not be justified. When a case arises in which the exact day is important, a computation may be made if desired; however, the astronomically computed date still is liable to an error of at least one day, partly because of unavoidable uncertainties in the computed time of new moon, but principally because of the uncertainty in the interval from new moon to the time when the crescent was actually observed.

"In answer to your first question, the error in the calculated time of new moon is due partly to the computational errors from the approximations in the particular tables used, and partly to the uncertainties in the orbital elements of the sun and the moon, and the variations which have occurred in the rate of rotation of the earth. The computational error of Schoch's tables for new moon, which were used by Parker and Dubberstein as the astronomical basis of their table, is less than 5 minutes. The possible additional error from errors in the orbital elements adopted by Schoch, and from variations in the rate of rotation of the earth, is very difficult to estimate, but the uncertainty is at least 2 or 3 hours in the first century A.D.

"The interval from new moon to the appearance of the crescent cannot be calculated from theory alone. Criteria must be established empirically for each individual geographical locality. Different writers have not always agreed completely on these criteria; and moreover, some allowance presumably must be made for variations due to local practices and circumstances at the time of each observation.

“In addition, the reliability of the correlation of dates in the ancient lunar calendars with dates in the Julian calendar depends upon the accuracy with which the calendar has been restored and the chronology established. We are not qualified to comment on this phase of the problem; the second edition of Parker and Dubberstein, published in 1946, undoubtedly is the best that was then attainable, though admittedly subject to further improvement. In answer to your second question, therefore, your conclusion that because of the three factors you mention, attempts to fix the dates of Nisan 14 in the early Jewish calendar are of doubtful validity, is correct. The dates of Nisan 14 in the years of the first century of the Christian era cannot possibly be determined by any astronomical calculation; they can be fixed, if by any means at all, only by the study and interpretation of contemporary records.

“You are welcome to quote this letter if you wish to do so, but we prefer that it be quoted in full and not in part.

“Sincerely yours,

(Signed) G. M. CLEMENCE

Director Nautical Almanac

U.S. Naval Observatory”

“H.M. Nautical Almanac Office,

Royal Greenwich Observatory,

Herstmonceux Castle,

Nr. Hailsham, Sussex,

England.

“24th January, 1956.

“Ref. 79/4

“Mr. Francis D. Nichol,

Editor, *Review and Herald*,

Takoma Park,

Washington 12, D.C.,

U.S.A

“DEAR SIR,

“In reply to your interesting letter of 15 January 1956, I regret that I am not able to give you much authoritative information or assistance in connection with your questions. Full answers can only be given by an authority on ancient chronology, and I can make no claim to be that.

“The chief difficulty in calculating the phase of the Moon two thousand years ago is the impossibility of predicting the irregularities of rotation of the Earth in the last two thousand years. It is known that the speed of rotation has been gradually slowing down owing to tidal friction, and a mean value for the effect of this is included in the secular acceleration of the Moon’s longitude; this value is itself uncertain and there must be added to this the fluctuations in the Moon’s longitude due to irregular changes in the speed of rotation of the Earth, which cannot be predicted. To some extent all of these changes are smoothed out by the fact that the values for the secular acceleration have been deduced from a study not only of modern observations but also of the records of ancient eclipses. Taking all things into consideration, I think it unlikely that the phase of the Moon will be in error by more than a few minutes of time at the beginning of the Christian era.

“An explanation of the possible error of two hours is that certain tables omit some of the periodic perturbations in the Moon’s motion; while greatly simplifying the calculations, these omissions can give rise to errors of about this order.

“I cannot answer authoritatively your second question, since this depends upon the theoretical estimate for the interval between new Moon and the first observation of the visible lunar crescent. A considerable amount of work has been done on this subject by such authorities as Fotheringham, Schoch, and Neugebauer, but the fact remains that purely local conditions can invalidate even the most careful work in respect of a particular observation of the lunar crescent.

“Yours faithfully,

(Signed) D. H. SADLER
Superintendent”

“BROWN UNIVERSITY
Providence 12, Rhode Island
January 19, 1956

“Mr. Francis D. Nichol, Editor
Review and Herald
Takoma Park
Washington 12, D.C.

“DEAR MR. NICHOL:

“I have your letter of January 15, and I hope the following remarks will clarify your questions:

“1. It is necessary sharply to distinguish between the problem of determining the moments of conjunctions or oppositions and the problem of first visibility of the new moon. All modern tables which you mention will give conjunctions or oppositions with extremely high accuracy. Consequently, all data which are connected with eclipses are fully trustworthy.

“Exactly the opposite, however, is the case in the problem of first visibility. All modern tables have to make arbitrary assumptions as to the visibility conditions in antiquity in general or in specific localities. These assumptions are highly arbitrary, and even for modern times, extremely unreliable. Since the phenomenon of first visibility is connected with sunset, all such tables involve inaccuracies of one full day. There are, of course, many cases where the question of first visibility might be decided with a great probability, but many critical cases will always remain undecided. I can refer you to contemporary Babylonian computations of first visibilities, which often leave the result in doubt. Modern tables are probably no better, and often worse. For reference I may quote my article, ‘The Babylonian Method for the Computation of the Last Visibilities of Mercury,’ *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 95, No. 2, 1951; and *Astronomical Cuneiform Texts*, London, 1955, Vol. 3, Plates 140 ff.

“2. Your reasons for doubting the validity of dating a Nisan 14 are fully justified. Every single argument mentioned by you would suffice to make the results truly doubtful.

“Very sincerely yours,
(Signed) O. NEUGEBAUER”

ASTRONOMISCHES RECHEN-INSTITUT IN HEIDELBERG
“Heidelberg, 21.2.1956

Grabengasse 14
Telefon 71231/330
71666

“Mr. F. D. Nichol
Editor of *Review and Herald*
Takoma Park
Washington 12, D.C., U.S.A.

“Dear Mr. Nichol:

“Professor Fricke has turned over to me the task of investigating the questions that you asked in your letter to him, and has requested that I answer you.

“Concerning your first question, there is this to say: the computation of the phases of the moon is based on the determination of New Moon. For this purpose one may use one of several tables which differ from each other however by the accuracy of the results to which they lead. There are in fact tables that yield results which may be in error by as much as an hour. On the other hand, by using C. Schoch’s tables (*Astronomical etc. ...*) one obtains the time of New Moon with an accuracy of a few minutes. In chronological problems one has to deal often with the determination of the new crescent, the visibility of which—as is well known—plays a distinctive role in the course of the old Jewish calendar. The accuracy of its computation by means, for example, of Neugebauer’s tables, is fully adequate for chronological requirements.

“I shall come now to your second question, namely with what accuracy may a 14 Nisan be computed. As long as the determination of 14 Nisan is based on the appearance of the new crescent—thus a purely astronomical problem—we encounter no difficulties whatever. The motion of the sun and moon back to ancient times is known well enough from eclipse data to compute the New Moon and the new crescent with sufficient accuracy, as stated above. The question is, however, whether at the time of Christ the beginning of the month was determined by the observation of the new crescent, or whether at that time other calendar forms were in widespread usage. This is an important matter that students of Antiquity must settle.

“If one assumes, for once, that the beginning of the month was based on the observation of the new crescent, one cannot affirm nor deny with complete certainty that a computed determination of a 14 Nisan would coincide with that obtained from actual observations of the new crescent. A departure from computational results may occur under certain circumstances if, in case of poor observing conditions, the length of the month was determined cyclically. In the same fashion, the empirical use of the intercalation [*i.e.* the insertion of a correction, such as a second Adar] may lead to discrepancies. Therefore each case must be considered separately in the handling of this problem, because it is always possible that, through the favorable situation of a particular case, a reliable computation may ensue, whereas, on the other hand, no unequivocal answer may be obtained in unfavorable circumstances.

“With kind regards,

(Signed) Dr. Ulrich Baehr.”[Translation from the German by Simone Daro Gossner of the U.S. Naval Observatory.—Editors.][In 1974 an inquiry as to any change, after 18 years, in the validity of the views expressed in the above letters was addressed to three of these four astronomers. Dr. D. H. Sadler pointed out that recent researches into the rotation of the earth and the secular acceleration of the moon indicate that the estimate, in

his letter of January 24, 1956, of the possible errors in the times of the phases of the moon was overoptimistic. The other two responses—from Drs. O. Neugebauer and R. L. Dunscombe (who replied as the incumbent in the position held by Dr. Clemence in 1956)—were similar. Both agreed that the earlier letters could stand unaltered, and that newer lunar tables (which agree within minutes of time with all other modern tables) have not lessened the uncertainty inherent in the calculation of ancient dates in lunar calendars. Such a reconstruction depends on estimating the variable interval from the astronomical new moon to the visible crescent.—EDITORS.]

Bibliography

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- BOAK, ARTHUR E. R. *A History of Rome to 565 A.D.* 4th ed. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955. 569 pp. A good short history of Rome, concise, readable, and authoritative. Chapters 16 and 17 deal with the events of the New Testament period.
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- HORN, SIEGFRIED H., and WOOD, LYNN H. *The Chronology of Ezra 7* 2d ed., rev. Washington: Review and Herald, 1970. 192 pp. A semitechnical work establishing the date 457 B.C. from source evidence. Its earlier chapters give the basic facts, with documentation, on ancient calendars and year reckonings. See the tentative tabulation of a Jewish calendar by these authors in this commentary, Vol. III, pp. 108, 109; see also, on calendrical problems, other books listed in the bibliography of the article on the Jewish calendar in Vol. II, p. 123.
- JOSEPHUS, FLAVIUS. See entry on p. 81.
- OGG, GEORGE. *The Chronology of the Public Ministry of Jesus*. Cambridge: The University Press, 1940. 339 pp. A survey of the dates set forth by various writers, arriving at the dates 28/29 to 33 for the ministry of Jesus. The student of the subject who can sift out the various opinions and weigh the evidence to reach his own conclusions will find helpful material in this book, even though its conclusions are not acceptable. For example, it explains and refutes the coregency theory of the 15th year of Tiberius (pp. 173–183); it discusses the differing solutions of the problem of the Last Supper and the Jewish calendar (ch. 9); it presents numerous views of the length of Christ's ministry (chs. 4–6), also of the date of the crucifixion and the methods of lunar computation commonly used (ch. 10).
- OLMSTEAD, A. T. "The Chronology of Jesus' Life," *Anglican Theological Review*, XXIV (1942), 1–26. An unduly dogmatic assertion of the supposedly fixed dating of the ministry of Jesus. By eliminating one Passover text from the Gospel of John and applying the "feast of the Jews" to Tabernacles, this article gives Christ's ministry as a little over one year. Its exposition of April 7, A.D. 30, as the crucifixion date is not new, but it goes beyond others in claiming absolute proof from a (theoretical) reconstruction of the Babylonian calendar (see Parker and Dubberstein in this bibliography). The same author, soon after his article came out, was betrayed into publishing a further unwarranted conclusion by his too-cursory examination of a new book on ancient synagogue readings from Scripture. He inserted into an appendix to his book *Jesus in the Light of History* (Scribner's, 1942) the assertion that the ministry of Jesus began with His sermon from Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth on Dec. 18, A.D. 28, and therefore lasted exactly 475 days! For a refutation of Olmstead's dogmatic assertions concerning supposedly fixed dates see Carl H.

Kraeling, "Olmstead's Chronology of the Life of Jesus," in the same volume of the same journal, pp. 334–354.

PARKER, RICHARD A., and DUBBERSTEIN, WALDO H. *Babylonian Chronology, 626 B.C.-A.D. 75*. Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1957. 47 pp. Contains tables giving the Julian date of the 1st of each month of the Babylonian lunar calendar, reconstructed from tables of Schoch and Sidersky, and incorporating information concerning certain 13th months from Babylonian sources. Its warning (p. 25) of a possible day's error in some of the months, and more for Jewish dates, should be heeded.

TALMUD. See entry *The Babylonian Talmud* on p. 101.

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¹⁷Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Mt 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.